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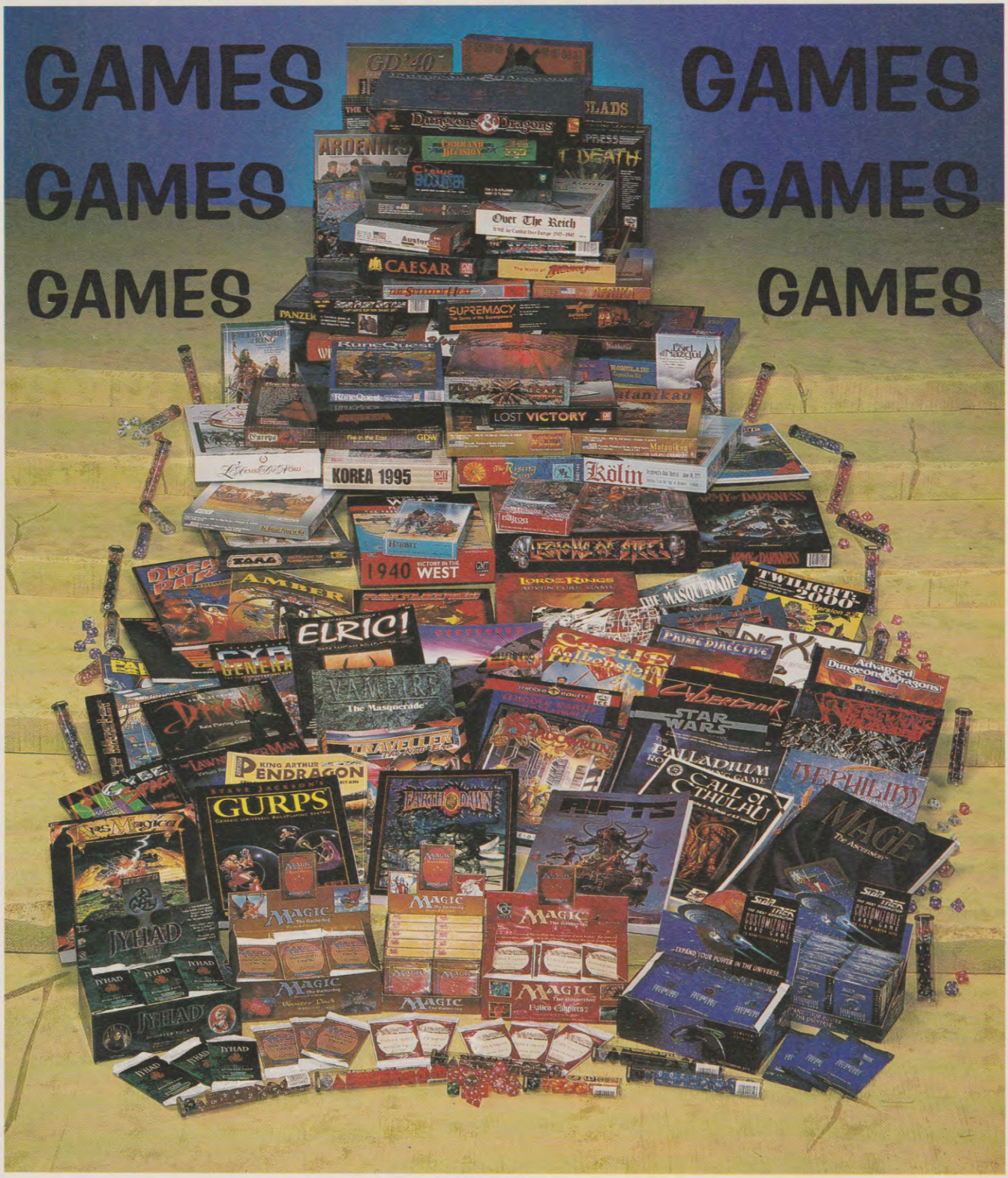

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This issue would have been impossible without...
milk of magnesia
This issue would have been a lot easier without... **the trots**

UP FRONT

We've been spending an awful lot of time playing *Magic: The Gathering* in the office this month. Myself, Simon the Publisher, Steve Faragher – we've hardly stopped. And why? Because we've been hotting up for the Nationals, which we attended on the 22nd of June. I'm not going to spoil it for you by telling you how we got on (Steve is writing a feature for us, to appear in next month's **arcane**), but then it's not just the taking part that's important at CCG and RPG conventions – it's the people you meet.

Conventions are the ideal place to meet fellow gamers – people who have a passion for the games we play and the enjoyment they generate. When you get a mass of these people together, the excitement simply bubbles over, and you really get a sense that you're joining in just a part of the greater whole, a chink in the chain of gamers across the country. So even if you only attend one convention this year, whether it be *Convulsion* this month, *EuroGenCon* in September, or one of the many others, make sure you go and keep the gaming community alive. For a full rundown of conventions going on across the nation this year, check out our listing starting on page 12.

Illustration Simon Gurr

This issue sees the amount of features in **arcane** grow. Increasing numbers of you have been asking for more feature content, and so we've dedicated more pages to what I think are some of the best features ever to appear in **arcane**.

We kick off with Steve Faragher's musings on what makes a cracking roleplayer. We take for granted what we're doing when we roleplay, a lot of the time at least, without paying much attention to ways we could actually improve (and have a better time while we're at it). Steve has come up with dozens of suggestions for making our characters more fun to play, and all of them are applicable to characters of mine. I'm sure you'll find the same. His feature starts on page 22.

And once you've discovered where you've been going wrong as far as roleplaying is concerned, you can have a bit of a laugh. We've been dubbing this issue the 'humour issue' in the office. If you turn to pages 28 and 36 I think you'll understand why...

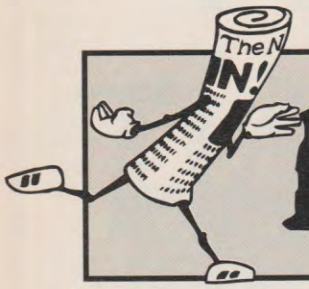
There are loads of other features, as I've already suggested, but that doesn't mean that we've forgotten to include a whole bunch of cracking reviews. *Wraith* fans should rush to page 60 to find out why the new *2nd Edition* has got this month's **arcane** Seal of Approval, and those of you who thought a CCG which is simultaneously a roleplaying game is an impossibility should flick though to page 66 where we review *Dragon Storm*.

When you've finished reading this month's **arcane**, let me know what you think. I'm making every effort to ensure that the mag gets better every month, that it's filled with the features you want to read, and to that end your comments are invaluable. Keep 'em coming.

Paul Pettengale
Editor

Which sadly deceased RPGs do you look back upon with more than a smidgen of fondness? There are more than a few, I'd wager. So, why not tell us all about them? Take a look at our Retro' review on page 21 and then write one yourself about your favourite, long-gone game. Send your piece to us, marked Retro' Review, and you may well see your name in print.

We welcome your comments on arcane, good or bad, so keep your letters flooding in! And if you want to e-mail me, the address to tap in is: pettengale@futurenet.co.uk



DESPATCHES

Magical CD-ROMs?

The long-delayed computer game based on *Magic: The Gathering* is almost here...

MICROPROSE SOFTWARE is putting the finishing touches to the PC version of *Magic: The Gathering*, and the game should finally see the light of day this summer.

Originally intended to be released early last year, *Magic: The Gathering* CD-ROM has been delayed while the game was converted to Windows 95. The good news is that this gave Sid Meier, designer of the classic strategy games *Railroad Tycoon* and *Civilization*, a chance to get involved in the project.

Magic: The Gathering CD-ROM offers several options for PC-owning *Magic* players. At the simplest level, you can hone your playing skills by selecting from a huge range of pre-designed decks and challenging the computer at one of four skill levels. If you want to play-test one of your own decks, or just play around with various deck strategies, you can also build custom decks from the game's impressive library of *Magic* cards, and then play them against the computer.

The bulk of the game, though, takes the form of an adventure across the lands of Dominia. Starting as an inexperienced wizard with a limited selection of cards from your chosen colour, you travel the world in search of adventure (and more cards). At towns and villages you can buy or trade for extra cards and undertake quests of increasing complexity and difficulty. Battles take the form of *Magic* duels, played for ante, and defeating the opponent wins you some of their cards. Eventually, you must find and destroy the source of a terrible evil which threatens the very existence of the planes.

MicroProse has yet to decide on the final selection of cards that will be included in *Magic: The Gathering* CD-ROM, but the early version of the game pictured here features both the *4th Edition* and *Unlimited* card sets, as well as the

Bear in mind that all the shots shown here are from an early version of the game, and there's still a fair bit of work to be done on the graphics. These should give you a rough idea of what to expect, though...

To the right is an early version of the adventure section of the game. The icons tell you how much gold, food and life you have, and how many spells (cards) are in your spellbook (deck). When you accept a mission, the scroll opens, reminding you what to do and how much time you have.

expansion sets *Antiquities, Chronicles, The Dark, Arabian Knights, Legends* and *Fallen Empires,* and 12 more unique cards which have been specially designed for the computer game and which will be unavailable anywhere else. There are also tentative plans to release upgrade disks for the game which will feature new expansion sets as and when they are released by Wizards of the Coast.

Magic: The Gathering CD-ROM looks set to be the perfect companion for any *Magic*-playing PC owner, and the adventure section of the game in particular offers a unique challenge, as you gradually increase your selection of cards and take on tougher opponents. Look out for a full **arcane** review in the near future.

Magic: The Gathering CD-ROM will be released in August by MicroProse Software on PC CD-ROM, and will set you back £44.99.

Pointing at a card in the play area gives you a detailed view of it here, complete with full text.

The two halves of the screen show you and your opponent's cards in play – opponent on the top, you on the bottom.

This area shows your life points, deck, graveyard and mana pool. The vertical bar to the left shows the phases of a turn.

Your hand is shown in this box, which highlights the title of any card that can be played in the current phase of the turn.

Together forever

R. Talsorian and Hero Games in merger (not quite a) shock!

Two of the industry stalwarts have signed a deal which means that from now on R. Talsorian Games, the creators of the rather superb *Cyberpunk 2020* system (upon which Richard Garfield's quite stupendous *Netrunner* CCG is based), will be releasing games published by Hero Games – the makers of the supremely successful and somewhat splendid *Champions* superhero RPG. The merger should fuel support for Hero Games' products, so you can expect to see a wealth of *Champions* supplements and material appearing in the run-up to the Christmas period.

As an adjunct, Hero Games intends to establish a new division, Hero Plus, which will be releasing Hero products in digital format (ie. on floppy disk and CD-ROM). These will be available primarily via mail-order.

And besides...

More Manga mania

The Secret of Mamo is the latest feature-length release from those animé junkies who work at Manga. Wolf returns (from his capers in *Castle of Cagliostro)* to steal a priceless (aren't they all) jewel, somewhat pissing his arch-rival, Inspector Zenigata, off in the process. Also throughout the summer, Manga will be releasing *Violence Jack: Evil Town* (which is not based on Trowbridge), *Giant Robo: Part 6* and *The Guyver: Part 1-4.* Check out your local video store if you care to snap them up.

We came, we saw...

Saturday 22nd June, 8.30am. Hung over. Not the ideal time to start playing *Magic* in a competitive environment, but hey, someone's got to do it. We had a storming day when Oliver Schneider won through to become Britain's best *Magic* player, earning himself (along with Rob Salmon, the other finalist) a place in the World Championships which take place in Seattle later in the year (15th-18th August, to be precise). We did not, however, do all that well. But we won't dwell on that now – Steve Faragher's in the process of writing a three-page feature which will tell you all about the event. Look out for it in **arcane** 10, which is on sale Friday 9th August.

It's a tall story

Does it, or doesn't it? Exist, that is. The Necronomicon, the infamous tome featured in Lovecraft's *Cthulhu* mythos works, has been the subject of much speculation, though only nutters really think that Lovecraft based his writings on an actual book bound in human skin. Somewhat tenuously we announce that *Legends of the Necronomicon,* the third and indeed final expansion set for Chaosium's *Mythos* CCG, should be on the shelves around about now.

Unfortunately, cosmic forces conspired against us getting hold of a review sample, so you'll have to wait until next issue for the **arcane** review. However, in the meantime you can check out our review of the second expansion, *Cthulhu Rising,* which is on page 68 of this very magazine.

And besides...

Terris a story

A computer, a modem and an account with America On-Line is all you need to get involved in *Terris*, a multi-player RPG that's played over the Net. Up to 40 players partake in what AOL is describing as a "mind-blowing fantasy". It's essential for players to join together in parties to combat the evil denizens which populate the *Terris* world, which should make for some interesting situations. Phone America On-Line for details about how you can set up an account on 0800 279 1234.

Bring on the dragons

TSR's new roleplaying system, based on the *Dragonlance* world which was originally used for a 14-scenario series of modules back in the late 1980s, is still on target for release in August. We originally reported on *Dragonlance: Fifth Age* back in **arcane** 4, and since then work has been progressing a treat. Look our for the full review in issue 11 of **arcane**.

Viva la Victoriana

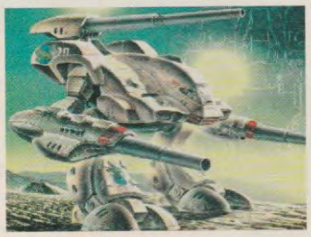
We've been on to Heresy Gaming, who assures us that work on its forthcoming roleplaying game, *Victoriana*, is so near to completion it hurts. It has supplied us with a sample printout of the text, and it's looking pretty good – you can expect a full review in the next issue of **arcane**. If you've forgotten since we previewed it in issue 7, *Victoriana* is a strange mix of fantasy and politics, set in the Victorian era. And, you can still get hold of a digital 'lite' version by checking out the company's Web site. Point your browser at: `http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages.heresy`

The BattleTech trading card game

Wizards of the Coast teams up with FASA.

Wizards of the Coast has officially announced that it is currently developing a collectable card game based on FASA's ever-popular *BattleTech* wargame.

BattleTech and the accompanying *MechWarrior* roleplaying system are set in the 31st century. Humanity has travelled to the stars and colonised hundreds of new worlds under the government of the Star League. The eventual collapse of the League, though, left many powerful factions vying for supremacy and plunged the galaxy into near constant warfare.



There are few things as much fun as stomping about in a 30 foot tall robot and kicking stuff...

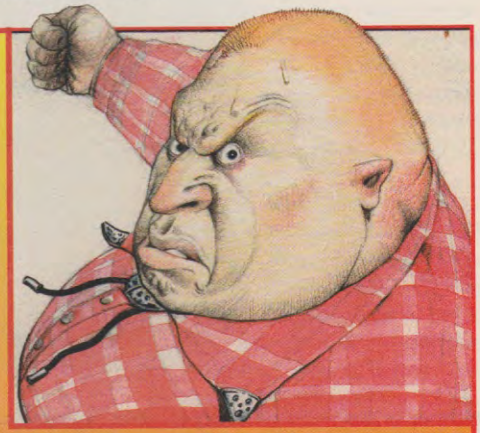
In the battle for worlds, the most important forces are the BattleMechs, huge fighting machines standing 30 feet tall and weighing up to 100 tons. Only the most skilled men and women become MechWarriors and command one of these awesome fighting machines. Set in the period from 3050 to 3052, cards in the *BattleTech* CCG will represent individual 'Mechs, groups of infantry, strategic locations and legendary individuals from the *BattleTech* universe. The game itself will combine resource management, strategy and tactical combat, as forces are prepared for battle and then pitted against each other in vicious, deadly combat. Richard Garfield, designer of *Magic: The Gathering*, *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle* (reviewed in **arcane** 1) and, most recently, *Netrunner* (reviewed in **arcane** 6) has been put in charge of the game's development.

COMING SOON

With 300 cards in the basic set, the *BattleTech* CCG certainly promises more than enough options and variety to keep even the most dedicated *BattleTech* fan very happy. The game is due for release in November, so look out for a full **arcane** review then.

Seymour J Clancy III's great outing

Our star-seeking sleuth is seething after a session with The Stranglers...



Ah have bin drinkin with mah all-time big buddies Jet Black and "DAVID" Greenslade off The Stranglers. We were indeluging ars-hey-elves at the *Stone Rock* Hell's Angels rock music festival jist ahtsahd Vienna way-ere mah fray-ends were demonstrating the art of "Dark Clothes & Dirges" with thay-are musical group. Jet confided in me over a deft deoch an doris that he was becoming increasingly distraught bah his cupboard player David's mixing with a so-called 'medi-evil rainy-actionment saucy ID' – way-ere he do dress up in full metal armour and he do swing a long-sword as long and heavy as hardly can be picked up bah the long-haired pee-nist.

"Jet," ars-ay-ed. "How dare you denigrate DAVID when ah have SEEN with mah OWEN AH-YES that you have deliberately doubled-up your diurnal diversions and descended into delinquent debauchery by roleplaying a Female Gladingater on the telling-vishun – ah KNOW about the game of 'Dangling & Duelling,' in which you do depilate your dermis and are deputed to down damsons weetabix you-err ample thaahs. Ah denounce you now... *(Snip – Ed.)*

An **arcane** T-shirt for the 'Laughing Gnome'. More in the box if you will denounce famous roleplayers, or even re-enact society members who play keyboards for really cool bands, then.

Polished chrome and rusty iron

R. Talsorian Games announces new releases for *Cyberpunk* and *Castle Falkenstein.*

It's a busy time for R. Talsorian Games currently – not only is it having to cope with its recent subsumption of Hero Games, but it's also got a full schedule for upcoming releases, especially for its *Cyberpunk* and *Castle Falkenstein* RPGs.

The media is big business, as we all know, but at no time is this glitzy world more prevalent than in the near future, where DMS and Net 54 battle it out for supremacy. *Live & Direct* is a forthcoming supplement for *Cyberpunk* which details the media in the *Cyberpunk* world. It traces the history of the media back to the 1940s, presents players with the opportunity to play media-based characters, examines how media issues should be integrated into a *Cyberpunk* campaign and takes a close look at the workings of the media giants – Net 54, DMS and WNS. Look out for it towards the end of this month, and expect it to be priced at around £10.

Also due at the end of the month, and also for *Cyberpunk* referees, is *Chromebook #4*. This details new vehicles, including everything from town cars to nomad transits; brings you a collection of software; presents you with a guide to style and fashion in the *Cyberpunk* world; and collects some of the best features to be found in copies of *Interface*, the *Cyberpunk* mag.

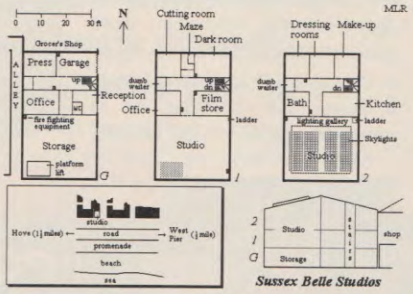
Falkenstein referees might want to check out *Sixguns and Sorcery*, which will be launched at this year's GenCon in August. This massive sourcebook brings the Wild West to the *Falkentstein* universe, complete with historical detail, new abilities, new magick and a gunslinging duelling system. Sounds odd and is likely to be so. Expect that to set you back around £18.

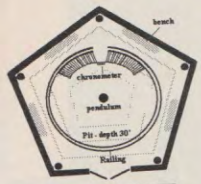
Finally, a totally new system is in the offing from R. Talsorian. *Bubblegum Crisis* is a brand new game which is based on Japanese animé cartoons, with a blend of cyperpunk action thrown into the mix. We'll bring you more details, and of course the definitive review, the moment we lay our hands on the game.

Fourth future

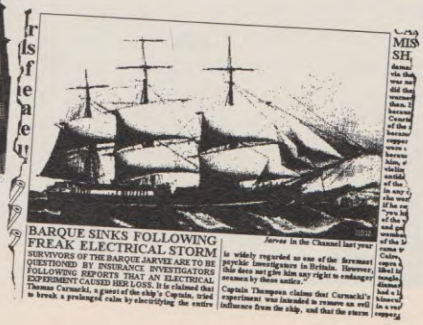
The fourth part of the *Forgotten Futures* RPG has been released.

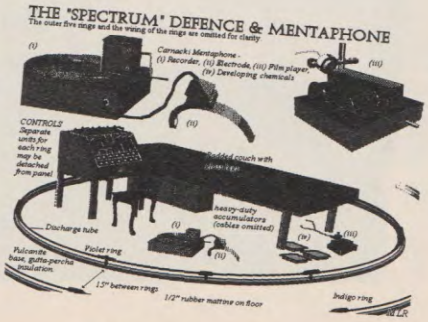
Marcus Rowland has been plugging away on his *Forgotten Futures* RPG for some time, and now he's released the fourth instalment of this system-on-a-disk as PC shareware. *Forgotten Futures Iv: Carnacki Cylinders* centres around the *Carnacki* stories by William Hoe Hodgson, and features the six stories, with the original illustrations, as part of the system's text. Because the game is shareware, operating on a try-before-you-buy basis, you can obtain a copy free by writing to: Marcus Rowland, 22 Westborne Park Villas, London W2 5EA, though a registration fee of £10 (in Britain, £11 for the rest of Europe and $20 in the States) is expected if you use the game. Registered users will also receive previous instalments in the game.

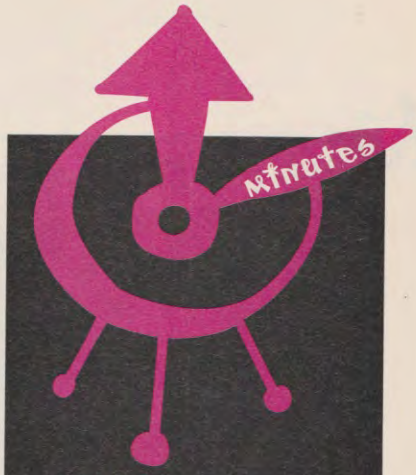




This curious pagoda-like folly at Starling Manor is a hollow shell built to accommodate a Foucault pendulum. It was erected in 1874 to settle a £100 bet, but building cost £7,250. It is 150' tall.







Famous for 15 minutes

"My husband cares more for his *D&D* friends than he does his child and me," complained one woman on *The Ricky Lake Show*, broadcast in Britain on the evening of Tuesday the 18th of June. Reports of this mention of roleplaying in the media arrived at our offices on the following Thursday, as James Insley of Aylesbury, Clifford Jones of Thetford and Nicola Sheehan of Dundee claimed their **arcane** T-shirts.

Nicola reports the woman as saying that her husband was making too many new friends through the noticeboard of his local gaming store. According to James, the insensitive fool played *Dungeons & Dragons* non-stop, leaving no time for his wife or his children. Perhaps she should get him to go through Andrew Rilstone's questionnaire in **arcane** 8, our correspondent suggests.

We think maybe Andrew's column in **arcane** 3 would be a more optimistic place to start, but Clifford may have a point – he quotes the aggrieved wife as saying that her husband was, "now playing every night, sometimes from 7pm until 6am". The lady went on to broadcast the ultimatum: "It's either *D&D* or me!" before the conversation moved off sideways, as it often does.

Ricky summed up by sharing with us that she thought roleplaying was a childish pastime, which she personally had "grown out of by the 10th grade". But then, from what we remember from the film *Hairspray*, Ricky had grown out of almost everything by the 10th grade. However, it would be gratuitous and cruel to dwell on that point, so we won't. But if you see anything like this, perhaps on the telly or in the paper, write to:

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or e-mail arcane@futurenet.co.uk

And we'll make you the vehicle of some cheap advertising for our magazine.

Conventions

The main events taking place over the next few months.

Convention diary

12-14th July StabCon 96
Woolton Hall, Fallowfield, Manchester ***Contact Stabcon,*** *17 Davenport Park Rd, Stockport, Cheshire SK2 6JU,* e-mail: hammy@riverbank.win-uk.net

13-14th July DrakCon 96
Roleplaying and CCGs with tournaments *Northern College of Education, Aberdeen* ***Contact Sandy Douglas,*** *5 Cottage Brae, Nellfield Place, Aberdeen, Scotland AB1 6DG,* e-mail: ncect6@rmplc.co.uk, web: www.drakcon.wintermute.co.uk/drakcon

13-14th July Battlemasters IV
Roleplaying, CCGs, board and wargames. *The Carlton Suite, Hagley Rd, Birmingham* ***Contact EuroLoG,*** *46 High St, Herne Bay, Kent CT6 5LH,* **01227 741624**

19-21st July Convulsion 3D
Roleplaying with tournaments *Stamford Hall, Leicester* ***Contact David Hall,*** *Convulsion, 21 Stephenson Court, Osbourne Street, Slough, Berks SL1 1TN*

3rd August Flashpoint London
The UK launch of the Flashpoint expansion for *Shadowfist* is celebrated at this tournament. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. **Contact Andrew Davidson, 01895 862526**, e-mail: 72717.212@compuserve.com

22nd September Spelbreker
Belgium's biggest gaming festival, now in its third year. Tickets 100bf. Contact: ***Johan & Joachim François***, Wilhelmpark 7, 9900 Eeklo, Belgium, **+32 9 3781265, fax +32 9 3781370**, or: ***De Media,*** *Molenstraat 165, 9900 Eklo, Belgium,* **+32 9 3779394, fax: +32 9 3783678**, e-mail: De Media@hookon.be, Web site: http://www.hookon.be/De Media

13-15 December DominiCon
Roleplaying and CCG tournaments. St Patrick's College, Maynooth, Ireland. **Contact Karl Monaghan,** 27 Great Oaks, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, Rep. of Ireland **(044) 41764**.

Here we go again...

Roleplaying games are thrust into the spotlight following a teenage suicide in Italy.

The death by suicide of a 19 year-old Italian student, identified only as Roberto C, has sparked off a round of anti-roleplaying publicity in the media across Europe.

The incident was first reported in the UK by *The Sunday Times*, under the headline "Spate of suicides linked to US game". The article then went on to describe how the deceased was allegedly a "passionate enthusiast" of "American fantasy roleplaying games," and proceeded to incorrectly identify *Killer* as an example of such a game. The rest of the article painted *Killer* in as unpleasant a light as possible, and made mention of the continuing anti-roleplaying campaign in America (discussed in 'Dicing with the Devil', **arcane** 6). The fact that *Killer*, published by Steve Jackson Games, is best described as 'murder in the dark with rules,' and about as likely to get someone seriously hurt, was not mentioned.

Coverage of the case has been far more prominent in the Italian media, with sensationalist headlines and poorly researched stories once again winning out over more reasoned discussions. The key figure in this appears to be Luciano Faraon, a lawyer who is calling for all roleplaying games to be banned, making such claims as, "They [roleplaying games] are all based on inhuman situations".

Unfortunately, the hysterical media attention has only served to obscure the facts of the case. There have even been unconfirmed reports that the boy's family has been vehemently denying that his interest in roleplaying and other games had anything to do with his tragic death.

Saddest of all is the fact that, if not for the alleged 'link' to gaming, the boy's suicide would no doubt have gone largely unnoticed by the media – there had already been 11 other teenage suicides in Italy in the same month, none of which sparked off such a furore of activity. It's a situation that all gamers will be familiar with, and one that's only going to continue as long as the mass media can boost its ratings by starting scare campaigns.

In response to the media coverage, the Italian gaming community has begun a petition on the World Wide Web. If you'd like to sign the petition or support the campaign from your own Web page, point your browser at: http://www.sincretech.it/3M/Stop-Non-Sense/Index-English.html.

Spate of suicides linked to US game

by John Phillips
Rome

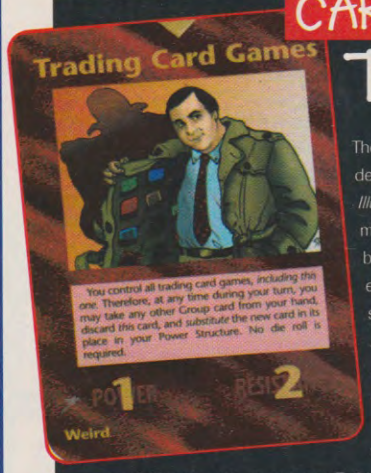
THE deaths of dozens of Italian teenagers in the past year have been linked to macabre "role-playing" games which call for players to act out executions.

An investigation has been launched after a 19-year-old student, identified only as Roberto C, was found hanging from a tree two weeks ago in the countryside near the Venetian town of Spinea.

The boy was a passionate enthusiast of American fantasy role-playing games such as Killer, in which a "game-master" chosen from among players assigns each one a victim to "kill".

Carlo Nordio, a Venice magistrate, is leading an investigation into a series of [illegible] suicides amid

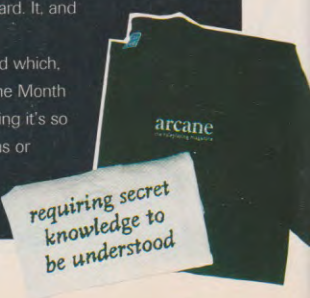
CARD OF THE MONTH


Trading Card Games
You control all trading card games, including this one. Therefore, at any time during your turn, you may take any other Group card from your hand, discard this card, and substitute the new card in its place in your Power Structure. No die roll is required.
POWER
RESIST 2
Weird

Trading Card Games

There's not a soul on this Earth who could possibly deny that Steve Jackson Games has got a decent sense of humour. Check out this card – Trading Card Games – which is for the *Illuminati: New World Order* CCG (and which came free with *The Duelist*, an American CCG magazine). It blatantly takes the piss out of itself, and the CCG hobby in general, featuring a bloke opening his trenchcoat to reveal dozens of cards which he has to offer. And the card effect... You control all trading card games, including *INWO* itself, thus placing yourself in a somewhat superior position as far as the present game is concerned. Inspired. Thanks to James McClellem from Portsmouth for supplying us with the card. It, and an **arcane** T-shirt, are on their way to you.

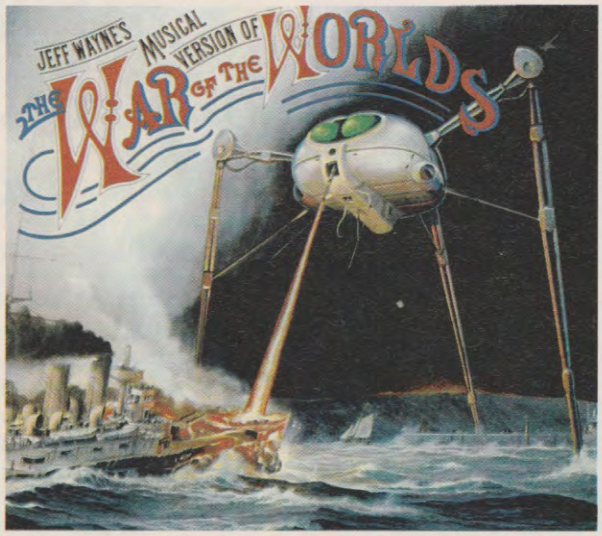
Okay, so how about the rest of you? Got a cracking card which, should grace the pages of **arcane** and receive the Card of the Month title? If so, send it our way, together with your reason for thinking it's so great. You may win an **arcane** T-shirt, and we promise to return your card (unless it's a Black Lotus or something equally valuable, in which case we'll be straight down the pub, via our local card emporium). Send your entries to: Card of the Month, **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW.



Ooh-lah!

The Martians and their death ray are back!

The chances of anything coming from Mars are a million to one, apparently. A fact reiterated time and again in the absolutely bloody fantastic *War of the Worlds* concept album which has, to date, sold more than five million copies worldwide. Originally released in 1978, it has now been digitally remastered to make the most of the high-quality sound reproduction of audio CD. This Special Edition two-CD set should be in the shops by the time you read this, though ten of you lucky blighters can get a copy for free, together with a rather snazzy T-shirt, by correctly answering the following question:



Q Who played the part of the narrator on the *War of the Worlds* album?

All you have to do now is scribble 'There's more chance of Martians landing than England winning the next World Cup' on the front of a sealed envelope or postcard, write the answer on the back, and send it off to: **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW. And good luck.

arcane COMPO

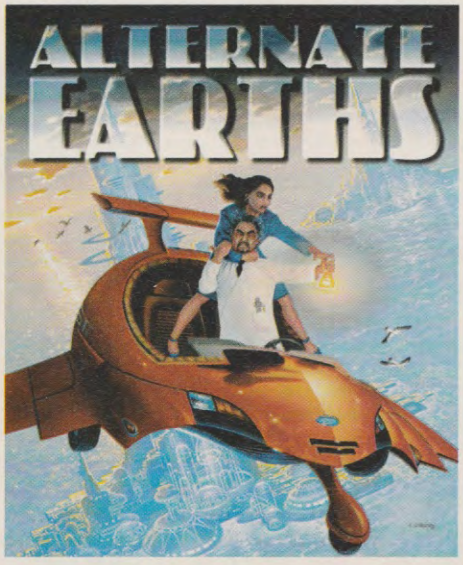
Rules 1. Closing date for entries is Friday 16th August. After that all entries will be sent to Mars and forgotten about.
2. We only accept one entry per person. And we really mean it.
3. Employees of Future Publishing, Sony Music and the Martian Federal Republic shouldn't even think of entering.
4. The editor calls the shots, he is not a Martian.

Strange but true

Take a trip to Wales for some rural mystery.

There are few of us who can honestly say that the prospect of a 'murder mystery weekend' sounds like fun. But then most of us have probably never been on one. So, why not give it a shot by giving Strange Times Theatre a call on 01938 820648. This Mid-Wales based company runs regular mystery weekends which charter the adventures of the Hack and Slaughter Associates – a thankfully fictional organisation who investigate, Lovecraft-style, strange disappearances and deaths. Venues used are diverse – so far the company has hired out old houses, deserted farms and even abandoned slate mines. Prices vary wildly because the lengths of the sessions are also diverse – they run from four hours up to 36 hours.

GURPS Alternate Earths



One small change in history, and the entire world could be a completely different place. SJG shows you how...

Steve Jackson Games has been cribbing our ideas! Okay, so that's not even remotely true, but it's got a new supplement planned which is strikingly similar in concept to our very own 'The Old New Age' feature which starts on page 30 of this issue, and our planned feature on parallel worlds in **arcane** 10.

Alternate Earths is a sourcebook for *GURPS Time Travel* refs which presents you with the opportunity to set your campaigns in a variety of alternative universes – where the States has been invaded by mutant nazis, say, or the Roman Empire never died. The supplement, which should retail at around £15, runs to 128 pages and is broken down into sections: there are complete histories with timelines for the various 'alternative Earths'; a collection of technological gadgets which 'could have been'; new character types; the somewhat curiously titled 'Smuggler's Guide to Interdimensional Trade'; a collection of plot ideas and guidelines for creating your own alternative Earths. Look out for our definitive review in the next issue of **arcane**, out on Friday 9th August.

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COMING SOON

The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall

Will Bethesda's upcoming game revolutionise computer roleplaying?

After three years of development, the second game in the *Elder Scrolls* series from American developer Bethesda Softworks is nearing completion.

Set in the world of Tamriel, *Daggerfall* casts you as a lone adventurer, commissioned by the Emperor to quell a potential uprising in the royal court of Daggerfall. What should make the game stand out from most computer RPGs is the effort that has gone into creating a living world, and giving the player plenty of freedom to explore it.

The gameworld is huge, with over 30,000 locations scattered across a texture-mapped 3D continent. Mountains, forests, grassy plains and deserts can all be explored, as can the towns, castles, dungeons and cave systems which are all fully modelled in 3D.

What's more, this vast world is not a static backdrop for your adventures, but a constantly changing place. The hundreds of computer characters continue to go about their business as days and nights pass and the seasons turn. How these characters react to you depends on your past actions towards them and your reputation, which likewise changes over time.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of the game, though, is in the level of interaction offered. As well as the central plot and the computer characters there are over 300 minor quests, missions and plots which you can become involved in, dozens of guilds and other organisations, and hundreds of monsters and enemies to defeat. You can even buy property and ships or trade goods and services (including a spot of smuggling).

All this is complemented by a fully developed game system which allows you to create your own customised character class, spells and magic items. If it lives up to its promise, *The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall* could easily herald a new age in computer RPGs. Look out for a full **arcane** review soon.

The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall will be released on PC CD-ROM by Virgin Interactive Entertainment in August, however, no price has been confirmed as yet.

COMPO WINNERS

'Holiday' competition winner

Ivan Fernandez of East Croydon is the winner of our 'Holiday' competition. He will have a week-long live roleplaying holiday with Labyrinthe in the Lake District from the 10th to the 17th of August. 100 runners-up will take part in other Labyrinthe adventures. They have been notified.

'Dustbin Liner of Holding' competition winner

Vinnie Saunders of Poole wins the enormous bag of tat pictured in **arcane** *6 plus lots of other stuff that wouldn't even fit into the photo. He correctly reckoned that the contents of the 'dustbin liner of holding' would weigh in at a hefty 23 kilos. And now there's yet another pile starting to form in the office...*

Star Wars draw competition winner

CMA tells us that L Fox of Reading is the winner of a factory-sealed, 36-packet, limited edition booster box of Star Wars cards.

Heaven can wait

In Nomine has to be "just right".

After a year of broken deadlines and unfulfilled release dates, Steve Jackson Games has now refused to announce a schedule for the appearance of its new roleplaying game *In Nomine* (**arcane** 1). The company tells us that the game is no longer on its current release schedule and explains that this is because it's taking much longer than expected to get it just how they want it. The folks at SJG say they don't want to start looking silly by making any more promises they can't keep, and so they've suspended release indefinitely. They will produce the game, they just won't say when.

In Nomine was first scheduled for last summer. A delay was to be expected then, because SJG concentrated its resources on exploiting the success of the revamped classic *Illuminati*. Now it seems illustrator Dan Smith and writer Derek Pearcy's version of the French RPG won't see the light of day, nor the darkness of night, until SJG is satisfied that its commission has been fulfilled to its exacting standards.

This is a major departure for SJG, because *In Nomine* will not be *GURPS*-based. The game originates from *In Nomine Satanis* and *Magna Veritas* – two complementary but distinct games written by a Frenchman known only as Croc and produced by Ideojeux. Players take the roles of angels or demons in the service of archangels or demon princes, while these higher beings, and any others they, in turn, may serve, are controlled by the GM. The PCs 'resonance with the Symphony' is balanced by their 'dissonance', which is generated when they fail to act in tune with their basic nature. The original games showed the powerful influence of the Catholic church on French life. We can expect a more irreverent, wacky version from the Americans, but one that should still preserve most of the ideas contained in Croc's original. When we can expect it is another matter, but we'll keep you informed.

next month in arcane

The return of
Marc Millers'
TRAVELLER

We bring you the world's first review of Marc Miller's *Traveller*, the game which has come back from oblivion, and which is sure to rapidly establish itself back at the top of the RPG stockpile. We'll be talking to Marc Miller, we'll have exclusive artwork from the game, and we'll be suggesting ways you can make the most out of the system.

A fresh look at Fantasy

We'll be asking the question: why is it that all fantasy games end up being set in a Tolkeinesk landscape? And then we'll be providing you with some alternative eras within which to set your fantasy campaign, kicking off with primitive societies in this first instalment of a four-part series.

...i was a magic tourney virgin...

How did Steve Faragher, consultant editor of **arcane**, get on when he took part in the national final of the UK's *Magic: The Gathering* tournament? Find out in our feature report next issue.
Plus, our usual groovy mix of features, reviews and insightful comment on the state of the RPG and CCG industries.

arcane 10 will be on sale Friday 9th August

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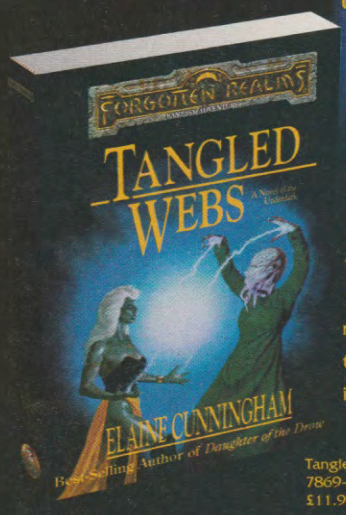

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COLUMN

I was a teenaged fanzine editor

'Daddy, Daddy - what was a fanzine?'

'Well dear, it was a bit like a web-page, only printed on something called paper...'

Andrew Rilstone

Andrew is the editor of *Interactive Fantasy*, the journal of roleplaying and story-making systems, and is also a regular contributor to arcane.

A FEW YEARS AGO you could have found me hanging around the dark, secluded corridors of most games conventions with a cardboard box tucked conspicuously under my arm. Thus prepared, I would leap out at unsuspecting members of the public and waft copies of a cheaply produced magazine in their general direction. "Hey, little boy," I would say, "Wanna see my fanzine?" I expect you've done a few things you're ashamed of, too.

This was, of course, a long time ago, in the days when Kirk was captain of the starship Enterprise and hamburgers were perfectly safe to eat. We produced our organs on what used to be called a 'typewriter', or – if we were very hi-tech – on 'Amstrads', which were something like computers, only with green screens. We used arcane substances such as 'Pritt-stick', 'Lettraset' and 'Tippex' to – I know you won't believe this – glue pages together. We called it 'paste up' and we thought it looked great.

This gave the 'zines a wonderful visual style. We used to have real misprints, wobbly headlines, wonky pages and upside-down pictures. On one occasion, I managed to cut the numbers off the bottom of each page of my magazine, and had to write them back in with a pen. Modern desktop publishing equipment simply can't reproduce this sort of home-made charm. Our whole print-run – sometimes as high as 100 copies – had to be reproduced on a photocopier. (Some editors claim to be able to remember bizarre Victorian devices called 'duplicators' and 'stencils' – but even I am not that old.) Rich editors paid professional copy-shops to print their fanzines, but this was generally regarded as cheating. The truly dedicated fan-hack tiptoed into his father's place of work, and clandestinely ran off copies on the office photocopier – or else he'd resort to feeding 500 5p pieces into the machine in the local library.

But the fun still wasn't over! We had to cover our bedroom floor with little piles of paper, and painstakingly staple each copy together by hand. This added greatly to the excitement of reading the finished product. You never knew if it was going to fall apart in your hand, or whether it would turn out that the pages had been assembled in the wrong order. And just occasionally, a rogue staple would snag your finger, causing that article on introducing vampires into *Traveller* to be authentically splattered with blood!

> **"Modern desktop publishing equipment can't reproduce this home-made charm."**

Fanzines came in many different flavours. There were munchkin froth-'zines, in which excited schoolboys explained their cool new rules for Vampire Chainsaw Cyberbunnies. There were specialist hack-'zines, in which hoary old-timers published eight-part features on realistic rules for Aztec potato fighting. Wannabe professionals published second-rate versions of games you could buy in the shops; waffle-'zines told you what sort of underwear the editor wore; gossip-'zines chattered about what other 'zine editors were doing; and rant-'zines printed long pontificating expositions of the editors' views on subjects which often had nothing to do with roleplaying games. This last type of fanzine was, in my totally unbiased opinion, by far the most worthwhile offering. The editors of such extraordinary publications sometimes disappear into cocoons and then re-emerge several years later as **arcane** columnists.

Some editors, I am told, sold enough copies of their fanzines to break even and pay for the next issue. Not me. I still have boxes of unsold copies of my organ; and the whole loss-making enterprise was paid for out of my somewhat dismal student grant. I told you this was a long time ago.

So why did we bother?

One reason; one reason only. We cared, passionately, about roleplaying games and had things that we wanted to say about them. Sure we were amateurish, but I think we were amateurs in a good sense: we loved what we were doing.

Fanzines encourage the spread of new ideas: the idea of diceless games was being discussed in fanzines well before *Amber* popularised the idea. They can tell the professional companies, extremely loudly and clearly, when they have screwed up. Most importantly, though, they are the central nervous system of the hobby: a veritable grapevine along which gamers can keep in touch with each other.

My own fanzine used to waffle on at great length about the rather bizarre types of game that my roleplaying group was experimenting with at the time. Once or twice I had encouraging letters from people saying things like, 'What? You mean you play games like that as well? I thought we were the only ones...' That, fundamentally, was what made doing a fanzine thoroughly worthwhile.

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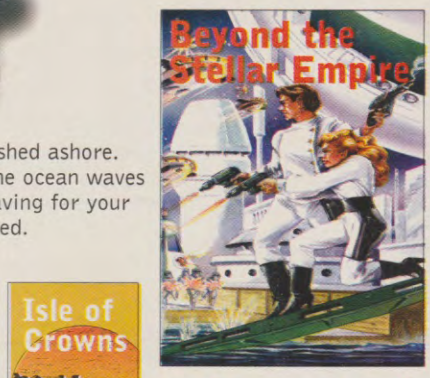

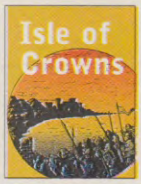

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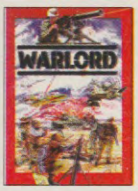

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COLUMN

On The Soapbox

Just why is it that we get so het up over making our games so complicated? Siobhan Williams from Stockport gets all mixed up and confused by simple addition and subtraction...

WHEN I STARTED OUT in roleplaying, I was young and enthusiastic, and I believed in adding a lot of new stuff. New spells. New magic items. New rules. New character classes. If I could have made up new shapes of dice, I'd probably have added those, too.

Then, over the years, I began to see that this was silly. I realised that I wanted something specific out of roleplaying, and adding stuff didn't necessarily help me get it. I wanted to make interesting characters and plots, not spend my time fiddling with probabilities and jargon, and anyway, I'd proved to myself that I could do that stuff – so now I could leave it behind. I became quite capable of arguing in favour of simple, story telling systems, and laughing at 'rules hackers.'

But I'm a lethargic, bloody-minded sod, so I didn't convert overnight, and I retained a lot of fondness for assorted old stuff for quite a while. And this, I think, helped me to see something about other people's attitudes. What I realised was that removing stuff from RPGs was becoming a bit of a fetish in some circles. People started by getting rid of the complicated rules and multi-sided dice which I now agreed were a bit silly, but then they also wanted to get rid of stuff that I was still fond of. For example, I've always liked character figures. This is annoying for me, because I can't paint figures to save my life, but I respect people who can. What's more, sometimes, when a game fight scene gets complicated, I find that a few markers on a map help a great deal – and I can't help feeling that they might at least look nice.

'But they never look like your character', say the subtracters, 'and they distract people from the story (which is sacred, of course), and anyway, playing with figures is wargaming'.

Well, tough. I was a wargamer before I got into RPGs. And if your precious plot can't take the competition from a well-painted figure, why bother with it at all?

But it's not just figures. The really dedicated subtracters – the minimalists – sometimes want to get rid of dice altogether, and character sheets, in fact everything but the story. I suspect that some of them would get rid of the players, and just sit there telling stories, except they know in their heart of hearts that they aren't very good at that. Anyway, they need moral support when they are sneering at the accumulators.

Oh yes – the accumulators are the people who are still adding stuff to RPGs. Figures, 3D scenery and computer GM-assistance programs... Some of them have managed more than I ever did, and invented new sorts of dice. I find them impressive, but I also find them a bit weird.

But I think that they are nearer to the mark than the subtracters. Roleplaying isn't a particularly original sort of activity. We pinch stuff from our favourite books, films, wargames, comics and anywhere else we want – and we put it together and have fun with it. (In fact, *Everway*, one of the most interesting 'minimalist' games of the last few years, found whole new areas to pinch ideas from – fortune telling cards, which replaced dice, and fantasy art trading cards, which became part of character generation.)

Now the subtracters are having fun, too. I don't begrudge them that, and I'm not going to force them to buy my little-used figure collection, or to run multi-megabyte game-assistance programs on their PCs. But I'm not going to let them sneer, either. RPGs are an accumulative hobby – they progress by addition, not subtraction. I hope that we keep seeing enthusiastic beginners throwing together everything they like and calling it a game.

Just so long as I don't have to play with them, of course.

"RPGs are accumulative – they progress by addition, not subtraction."

ON THE SOAPBOX is your page – it's where we give you the opportunity to get something off your chest (as long as it's to do with the gaming industry, of course). The views expressed by you on this page aren't necessarily the views of arcane, or of the arcane editorial team. If you'd like to have your say, send in a piece of around 700 words long to: On the Soapbox, arcane, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. Or e-mail it to: arcane@futurenet.co.uk.

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RETRO

James Bond 007

Designed by Gerard Christopher Klug

Published by Victory Games Inc. Boxed set £11.95 First published in 1983

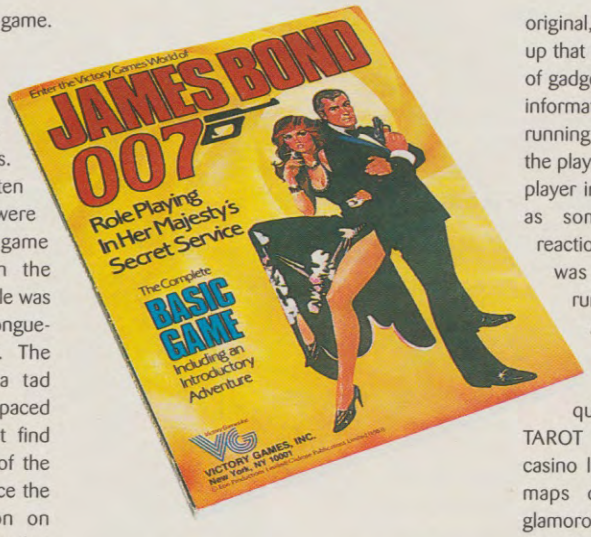
Larger than life characters, loose, almost non-existent plots, fantastic gadgets, fast cars, beautiful women, lots of shooting and explosions, megalomaniac villains and ludicrous names – all set in exotic locations in a glamorous version of our own drab world. James Swallow spies on the *James Bond* RPG...

SOUNDS IDEAL FOR a roleplaying game. And so it is. Or was.

James Bond 007 the RPG was a classic. Or, more truthfully, the idea of a game based in the Bond world I have described was. The rules themselves were written adequately enough, and there were plenty of examples of the game mechanics and helpful hints in the sidebars for the referee, but the style was a little too dry to truly convey the tongue-in-cheek nature of the movies. The system was fine, but perhaps a tad complicated in parts for the fast-paced action sequences that really must find their way into every other scene of the game in order to faithfully reproduce the pace of the movies. The section on gadgets was somewhat sparse, given that Bond always has at least two or three new and deadly gadgets for every mission he is sent on, and considering the impressive speed with which 'Q' always seems to churn them out.

So perhaps I am wrong and maybe *James Bond 007* was not such a classic roleplaying game after all. But on the other hand...

Every genre has or had its roleplaying games – wild west, space opera, time travel, horror, fantasy, and so why not espionage? In fact the world of spies is excellent for gaming, and there were several other secret agent RPGs available at around the same time. The rules for *James Bond 007* were at least as good as any of the others. The components and production quality were quite exceptional. The support material was plentiful and exceeded, in both quantity and value, that available for most of the other like-minded roleplaying games available.



All of that together with the one thing all of the others didn't have – the *James Bond* license (to kill?). With this, the tone of the game was instantly accessible to the players and referee alike. I mean, who has never seen a Bond film? I didn't think it really mattered much that the game system wasn't particularly original, and besides, it didn't really take up that much of the rulebook which, lack of gadgets aside, did have a great deal of information and advice for the referee on running the game, working together with the players to create enjoyable games, on player interaction with the NPCs, as well as some smashing encounter and reaction tables. Most of this information was extremely useful to referees running any games, not just *James Bond 007*. The background material was also, of course, plentiful and of excellent quality, from details on M.I.6, TAROT (the baddies), gambling and casino life, together with overviews and maps of some suitably exotic and glamorous cities around the world.

"Every genre has its RPGs – wild west, horror, fantasy – so why not espionage?"

The boxed set also contained a book called *Thrilling Locations*, which was one of the most impressive supplements to a game I think I have ever come across and which included black-and-white and full colour photographs of some of the most exclusive casinos, hotels and restaurants from around the world. The supplement included so much glorious and carefully articulated detail that if scenario ideas didn't leap out at you from every page you would have been much better off sticking to *Monopoly*.

The *James Bond 007* roleplaying game had exactly the same sort of instantly playable background that, say, *Star Wars* does. It had 'M', 'Q', Moneypenny, Oddjob, Jaws, Goldfinger and Scaramanga. It even had the infamous Pussy Galore! What more need be said?

Some other RPGs in the genre were *Top Secret* (TSR), *Espionage* (Hero Games) and *Mercenaries, Spies & Private Eyes* (Blade).

There was an adventure module based on all, or almost all, of the Bond movies starring Sean Connery or Roger Moore.

Collectable card game fans may also be interested to hear that there's a *James Bond 007* CCG, published by the American company Heartbreaker. We reviewed in in arcane 5, though it has to be said that it was rather mediocre. Sorry guys.

Inventing ridiculous names for the baddies, and filthy names for the women (sexism aside) was one of the real joys of playing the game. As indeed was slipping into poor Scottish accents and saying things like 'Martini, shaken not stirred'.

Pull Yours

There's lots of advice for referees on how to run a better game, but Ste

'Oh great,' you're thinking. 'Now some bloke who's never met me is going to tell me how to improve what I'm doing. That's just what I need.' So I'll get the apologies out of the way early on. I don't know how to make you a better roleplayer, there's no guarantee of the 'if you're not a better roleplayer in ten days we'll refund your money' type here. All I can do is show you some examples of what I think good roleplaying is and hopefully get you thinking. Start thinking about it a bit more and you'll become a better roleplayer immediately. There, that was easy, wasn't it?

The very beginning

The best time to improve the way you roleplay a character is when you create it. And a useful way to get you thinking about how your character should develop is to simply ask yourself a few questions about him or her, and of course talk them over with the referee. So, what questions should you be asking yourself to help define your character? Try the following:

1. What were my parents like? This may not always be relevant, but the point of it is to get you thinking about the background of your character. This will not only provide the referee with lots of information, but also help you to get a grasp on the character. Don't overdo this part though, you want to leave some room for the referee (and indeed yourself) to develop the character's background as the game progresses.

2. Where do I live? After sustenance the most basic requirement of any sentient being is shelter. So where does your character live? Has he or she been there long? And if not, where did the character come from? Even ask yourself what the neighbours are like. All this sort of information helps you *place* your character, giving him or her a credible background. Once again, this isn't always necessary or relevant, but it can give you a greater insight into the personality of your character. Where you live is one of the most profound influences on what sort of person you are.

3. What do I do? The answer to this may be as obvious as 'adventurer' or 'mercenary'. If it is then think about what else your character could do if he or she had to. And even 'nothing' is an acceptable answer; it would just mean that your character is a pretty desperate individual with few skills to fall back on. But don't be blind to other possibilities. While *AD&D* usually imagines that you are 'just' a full-time adventurer, games such as *Call of Cthulhu* introduced the concept that characters will have lives outside of their adventuring. An even better example of this is contained within the Arthurian RPG *Pendragon*. These games are run with each session equalling a year of the character's life, so as well as going on adventures, there are loads of other things that the characters need to be worrying about in each session. Choose a balance that satisfies you, but don't be afraid to ask the referee to give your characters the chance to develop over a longer period of time.

LF TOGETHER

Farasher thinks the players should be taking on some responsibility too.

4. **What do I want to achieve?** Setting some sort of goal for your character is a very easy way to improve your enjoyment of the game. This may be as simple as 'become incredibly wealthy', although that would be a little dull. It may well stem from your answers to the other questions as well. It may be that your character's determined to avenge the death of his or her parents (question one), or wants to become the best blacksmith in the whole world ever (question three). Be inventive with this, but be sure that you always consult with the referee before you finally decide – otherwise you may unwittingly put a spanner in the game's works.

The point of all these questions is to get you thinking about your character's motivation. Unless you just happen to be playing in a game such as *Earthdawn* which ties character levels into the gameworld, you need to develop some real motivation in order to improve your enjoyment from roleplaying. Motivation is the reason for your character's continued existence: just what is it that your character wants to achieve or do in life? Once you get a good handle on this you'll be on your way to better roleplaying.

Fitting in

And now a word of warning about all that I've been getting you to think about so far. Don't lose sight of the fact that you're playing a game that, unlike nearly any other game I can think of, relies on co-operation rather than competition. Try to talk with the other players when you're designing your character and find out what they're doing. After all, there's little fun in having a character whose goal in life is to kill all Drow only to find out that everybody else in the party *is* a Drow. Once again, this isn't a hard and fast rule – there may be situations in which something like that could be a great deal of fun – but for most games you're just going to end up ruining the enjoyment of everybody else and, when the game starts to suffer your own enjoyment does as well.

Ideally you want to choose a character that *complements* the others in your party. For example, I believe that one of the reasons for the phenomenal success of *AD&D* is the way the character classes so sharply define everybody's role in the group. What could be more straightforward than a Wizard, Fighter, Cleric, Thief combination? And yet its very simplicity ensures that every player has a very distinct role in the game which thankfully allows them the opportunity to roleplay.

Good roleplaying is a combination of having a well-designed, carefully-crafted character and being flexible enough to sometimes sacrifice some of that sense of identity for the sake of the game. Don't be too stubborn about your character's traits. The game is more important than you are.

Be yourself

One of the perennial debates in roleplaying is whether you should try to create a character that's very different from yourself or whether you should just 'be' yourself. As you'll no doubt remember, most players don't even think about this when they play their very first roleplaying game, they just *are* themselves and usually enjoy it immensely. Here there is no easy answer to becoming a better roleplayer; you just have to do what suits you. It's easier to play yourself and be a good roleplayer; you're just doing what comes naturally, and your own personality infuses your character with a life that's difficult to manage otherwise. Indeed *Villains and Vigilantes,* the superhero RPG from Fantasy Games Unlimited, encourages you to 'be' yourself. In that game you have to define yourself in game characteristics, so if you thought you, as a person, were strong you'd give your character a high strength and so on. All of that has to be agreed with the referee. After that you get the powers which turn your character into a superhero. It's an interesting exercise to apply to other games...

But just as much as being yourself is fun, there's nothing more challenging, and interesting, than playing a character with whom you have little or nothing in common. It *is* more work and you should also be aware that, as has happened to me on a couple of occasions, you can end up with a character you don't like. Nonetheless, those experiences stand out from my lengthy roleplaying experience as being enjoyable. So, next time you're creating a character why not put yourself in a situation that you wouldn't normally encounter, and take the opportunity to do something different. After all, any reasonable referee will let you retire a character you don't like if it all goes horribly wrong.

arcane has included several features with great ideas for improving your roleplaying in many different ways. Try reading 'Breaking the Mould' (**arcane 2**), 'Bizarre Characters' (**arcane 3**), 'Heart of the Matter' (**arcane 4**) or 'Heading in the Right Direction' (**arcane 8**), all of which contain great advice. See page 53 for back issue details.

What's your sign?

Now those of you who don't play *AD&D* very often will have to excuse me for a moment while I discuss the thorny point of roleplaying and alignment. Alignments, contrary to the opinions expressed in the *Player's Handbook,* are not generally conducive to good roleplaying. A couple of them are; Lawful Good offers some scope for decent roleplaying – is your Lawful Good character a fanatic who'll die for his cause or a chisel-jawed hero? (they *are* fun to play) – but for the most part they are arbitrary. They are a leftover from the original *D&D* rules, something that has never been resolved. In last month's magic feature, Paul explained that *AD&D* magic draws on the novels of Jack Vance. *AD&D* alignment draws from the fantasy novels of Michael Moorcock, in which he suggested that the whole multiverse was influenced profoundly by the raging war between Law and Chaos, a kind of metaphor for the struggle of life. Unfortunately, what works well for novelists doesn't seem to be so clever for gamesplayers.

My advice would be to lose the alignments almost entirely. Treat everybody as being of neutral alignment except the few who are fanatically involved in religion. An even better bet is just to quietly ditch all alignment together. You'll be surprised just how easy that is.

And on that note...

Being a better roleplayer is not as straightforward as it seems, because of the complex nature of roleplaying games. Some very straightforward character types can be tremendous fun to play, just because their simplicity enables greater freedom. For example, if you're playing an *AD&D* character with the original rules of character class and alignment, you can create characters that almost play themselves, leaving you with the enjoyment of fully immersing yourself in the adventure. Equally,

great characters: number 1

The Reverend Sidney Green *(Call of Cthulhu)*

He was a kindly soul. Absorbed by study and devotion, Sidney Green appeared distant to some people, kindly to others, like a favourite uncle. Through his associations with a newspaper reporter and a policeman he came into contact with unspeakable horrors which dramatically changed his life. He became violent, moody and arrogant. He started drinking heavily and took to carrying a sawn-off shotgun about with him. He would often be seen up in the middle of the night, and during the day there would be no response from his bell. Eventually he disappeared from the village never to be seen again – a transformed man.

What made Sidney Green such a good character?

It is not uncommon for characters to go insane in *Call of Cthulhu* campaigns. What made Sidney different was that it happened gradually. He didn't wait until the game declared him insane, he changed bit-by-patient-bit throughout the length of an entire campaign. Every sanity point he lost would send him a little further down the road to the asylum, and whenever he gained any points his attitude would straighten out for a bit.

complex characters can be more difficult to play because of their innate restrictions, but offer greater satisfaction in overcoming that challenge. While it's easy to view that second approach to roleplaying as creating problems for yourself – by saying that your character will act irrationally under certain sets of circumstances because of the personality traits you've imagined it to have – it can be just as rewarding to triumph against those self-imposed restrictions. It's a different kind of reward but a worthwhile one, and definitely helps referees with lofty aspirations for their campaign.

Every quiet minute of serious thought away from the game that you dedicate to your character's motivation will be a minute that rewards you severalfold when you find yourself back in the game.

Some Specific Examples...

Now that we've been through some of the principles of making your characters interesting, let's come up with a few suggestions as to how you can set your character apart from the herd. Here are a number of characteristics which anyone should be able to roleplay well...

1. Gambler: *No, not the cold, cynical money-making machine that most in-game gamblers are. You're different. You just can't lose – at anything. You are utterly convinced that you're the luckiest person that ever lived. Everything goes just right for you and anybody who tries to tell you different is a fool.*

Obviously this is one trait that can cause your character some real problems. Unless the referee decides that you *are* the luckiest person in the world, you're going to have a hard time keeping hold of any money that you get. Make a deal with one of the other players (or get the ref to provide an NPC) that they assume some of the responsibility for your money, look after your most valuable assets or whatever. It won't always be fun for them, but it'll certainly bring some more roleplaying into your game when you try to convince them that you must have access to your entire reserves, because you know that the cyber-dragon in trap three is guaranteed to win today's race.

2. Loyal Servant: *Whatever your cause is, you believe in it fervently. No amount of propaganda from other people will ever sway you from THE ONE PATH. Your faith gives you courage and hope enough to fight to the bitter end for your beloved cause.*

Whatever you may think of them, fanatical people *can* change the world. Roleplaying a fanatic can be a great experience – in some respects one of the most authentic you can get. Providing the information you have is sufficient, it should require few choices on your behalf –

Great characters: number 2

Smidge (8th Level Fighter *AD&D*)

All of these great characters are from games which the arcane team have used from time to time. Smidge is a classic *AD&D* character. He started life as a gnome illusionist, but on his first adventure things went disastrously wrong and he was transformed permanently into a troll (slightly harsh refereeing perhaps, but it all turned out for the best). Soon after, Smidge (by luck, of course) discovered a ring of Disguise Self (which allowed him to appear human) and life was never the same again. He switched classes and became a fighter, dropped his long gnomish name and took up the soubriquet of Smidge. Many adventures later Smidge semi-retired and bought himself a pub. Smidge was enormously generous and would never see a friend go short of anything. On the other hand he was a ferocious foe in battle and absolutely fearless.

What made Smidge such a good character?

Adaptability is the key here. The player running Smidge had a good deal of the above-mentioned background work done for Smidge's original gnomish character, and had to ditch that completely and start again from scratch on the very first adventure. A good rule for better roleplaying is to always be adaptable.

If you're getting a bit bored with the game you're involved in try buying a brand new one and switching to it. Something set in a completely different genre, possibly one you wouldn't normally think you'd enjoy. Swapping systems can give your games a real boost and you'll be surprised how much fun you have.

just a flat following of the party line. Except that every so often you'll have to make a monumental decision about things that threaten your faith itself. And if you get tired of being so pedantic, just lapse. Being a lapsed fanatic can be just as much fun as being a dedicated one.

3. Optimist: *As well as believing fervently that everything will turn out for the best, these characters always see the best side of people. They are open, friendly, kind and forgiving. They will automatically place their trust in strangers and are even likely to trust people who have already betrayed that trust before, saying something like, 'but that was then. Arnold Black Nimblefingers is a reformed character now…'*

The optimist is a fun character to play and beats the spots off any 'Lawful Good alignment' restrictions. For a start you're going to be the cause of lots of in-party arguments in which you always get to take the moral high ground. On the downside you're also going to get your fingers burnt every now and again, but it'll be a really callous referee who doesn't reward you with a wide circle of useful friends and contacts all willing to be helpful because you're, well, such a nice character. Just remember that being optimistic and friendly doesn't mean you have to be stupid as well.

4. Bon Viveur: *Only the finest wines, meats, clothes and creature comforts will do for the Bon Viveur. These are characters who do not enjoy wilderness adventures and the privations that are part and parcel of them, but on the other hand will always be able to find the best hotel in town. There is no better friend to have at times than a Bon Viveur.*

This is a deceptively simple characteristic to have which will add hugely to your roleplaying enjoyment. There's plenty of room for it to lead to lively debate in the party about where to camp and which hotel to stay in, but more importantly it will open up a side to your campaign which may or may not already be there. The entire party will find itself having adventures on nights off, as it's dragged around town by a Bon Viveur in search of a good time. And the referee will find that scenario ideas start to come both in reaction to the Bon Viveur's behaviour and to the extra thinking that the Bon Viveur will force him to do (where do they grow the best wine in your campaign world?).

Something that can really help you get more out of a game is playing an already created fictional character. Try being Alan Rickman's Sheriff of Nottingham from *Robin Hood* in the next *AD&D* game you play, or try a Sherlock Holmes meets Cthulhu campaign. Take any popular fictional character and don't be afraid to play it yourself. You'll find that you automatically do lots of the things talked about in this feature.

Great characters: Number 4

Sir Lancet Therald (6th level Paladin *AD&D*)
He was brave and magnanimous in victory. Most of all, he was a religious nutter, forever proclaiming the right to strike foes down in the name of his lord.

Until that fateful day when his enemy stuck a helm of alignment changing on his bonce. How he wrestled against the chaos which pervaded his mind. But he'd slip back under the helmet's power and take a sword to a virgin's throat. He was finally fireballed by the party's elf...

What made Sir Lancet such a good character?

Before his great tragedy befell him he played his alignment well by translating it into fanaticism. After the helm business the player made a fantastic show of Sir Lancet struggling with the power of the artifact. But imagine how much less convincing that would have been if Sir Lancet wasn't already a strong character...

Great characters: Number 3

Tarsis Starfinder (Merchant, *Traveller*)
Tarsis was a first-time character for a player who was lured into the fascinating world of *Traveller* by being told that he'd find it just like *Elite*, the then-revolutionary 3D space trading and fighting computer game. All Tarsis was interested in was trading in *Traveller*, he didn't like adventuring at all and got quite frustrated when the other players kept getting into trouble of one kind or another. After some time he got more into the swing of things, but his character always remained very much the same. In his view he always had to come and save the other characters from whatever trouble they'd got themselves involved in, and was always muttering darkly about how much it was costing him.

What made Tarsis such a good character?

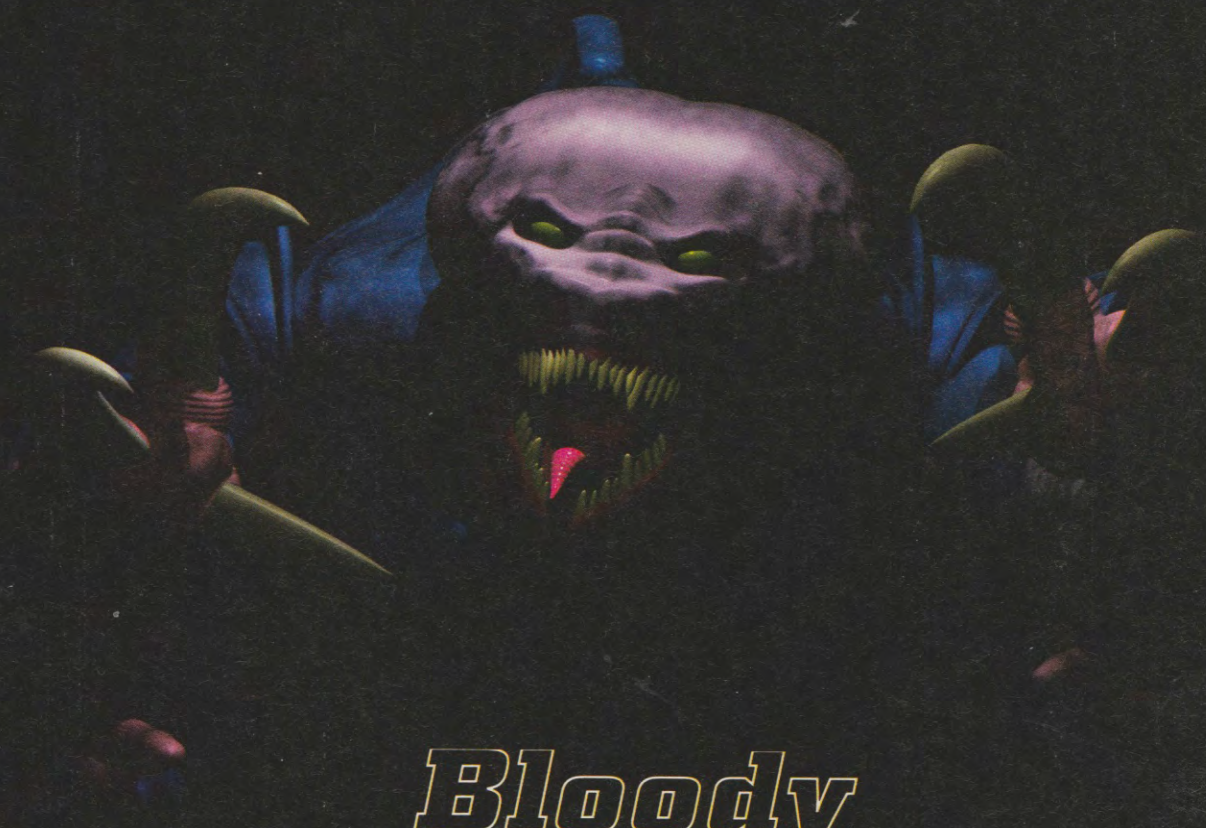
Because he had a life outside being an adventurer, that wasn't the be-all and end-all of his character. Tarsis had something else to worry about – his trading career – and that meant he always considered adventuring in a different light to the other players. Simple, but very effective.

Think of heroes you've enjoyed reading about or watching; think of one-word descriptions of characteristics and then expand on them. Don't be afraid to try something outlandish – I still remember a Melniobonean I played in a *Stormbringer* campaign who was a sadist. He did disgusting things until he was killed by other members of the party, but he was a character I enjoyed playing for a while and that (warning: pretentious comment ahead) taught me something about myself. Now you don't get that playing Snap.

NEXT MONTH we revisit the *Traveller* universe, taking a look at the new version – *Marc Miller's Traveller*, which is to be released at this year's GenCon.
Look out for arcane 10, on sale Friday 9th August.

ELECTRONIC ARTS

HARD



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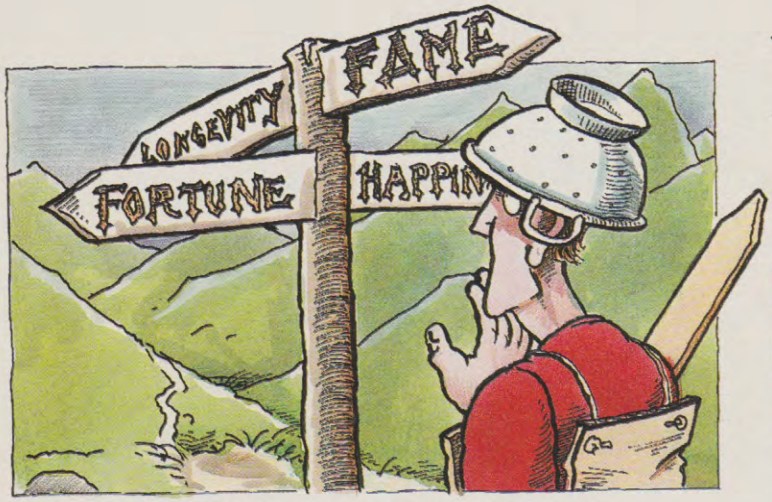
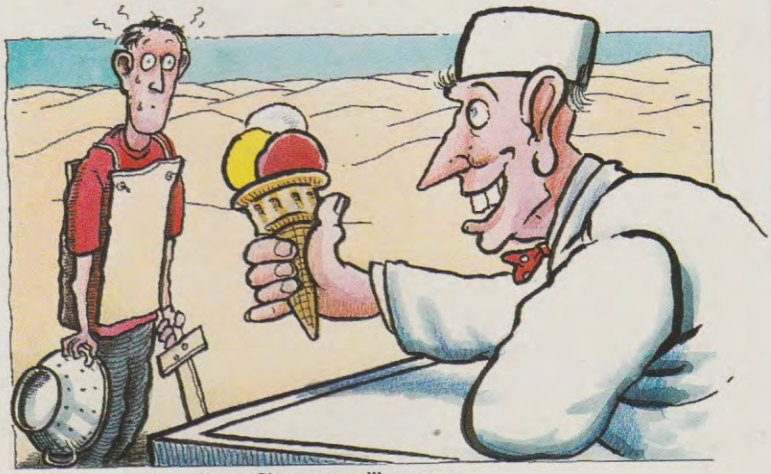


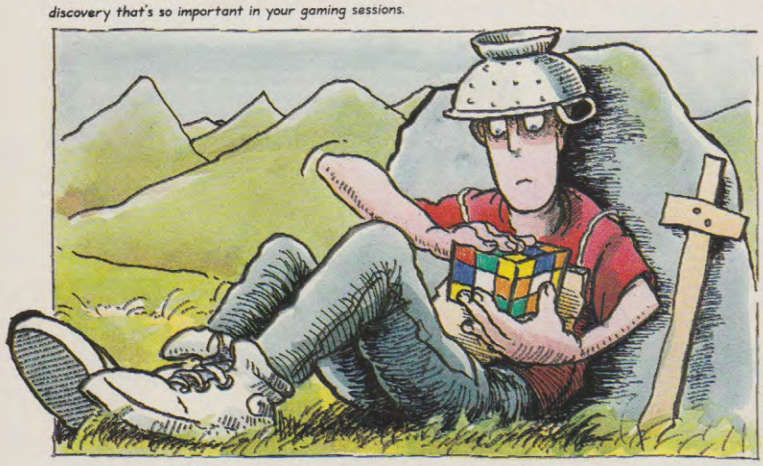
They are a particularly elite group of people. They are always kind to their mothers, extremely generous to beggars and they're usually great fun to be with: but the sad fact of the matter is that ***no-one wants to play in***

1 Don't let the players feel that they are in control of their destiny.
Make sure that you have the plot of your game written out in detail before the first session, and punish characters who deviate from the story. Make extensive use of deus ex machina: however badly the PCs screw up, find some excuse for them to succeed. If the dragon is winning the fight, have Superman fly in and kill it for them. If they make a bad tactical decision, have Spock beam down and tell them what they should've done. Players find the game more relaxing if they know that they can't lose.

2 Don't think about the background or the scenario in advance.
Try to ensure that the King's name changes from week to week and that the distances between major landmarks vary from time to time as well. When the players say something like, 'We were looking for Greenbeard's lost treasure' look confused and say, 'Er, remind me: who was Greenbeard again?' This is a wonderful way of keeping your players off balance, and of maintaining that sense of surprise and discovery that's so important in your gaming sessions.



3 Give all your Non Player Characters silly names.
Players will find the Dark Lord more believable if he is called Horatio the Horrid. You should parody the action of the game, particularly if it is serious, epic or dark. Scatological humour and double-entendres go down well. If the PCs have spent six weeks trekking across the crystalline desert in order to slay the Great Arch-Dragon, then they will appreciate it if you lighten the tone of the climactic moment. Advanced students might like to try introducing serious plotlines into games of Toon or Hol.



4 Ensure there are some impossible puzzles in the game.
To make them especially challenging, there should only be one solution. You should only accept that specific solution in the exact words written in the scenario. (Do not allow players to use their imagination and ingenuity to come up with a different solution of their own: this smacks of cheating.) You should be willing to wait for four or five hours for them to come up with the correct answer. Spend this time smirking about how clever you have been: expressions like 'It really is obvious' add tension.

5 Stick to the exact letter of the rules as printed in the rulebook.
Let's face it, your player's enjoyment will be ruined if you say that a druid gets +1 when doing an inverted double feint with a halibut if the rulebook actually says he gets +2. In most cases, the rulebook will be quite long and complicated, so your best bet is to skim it and pick up a general idea of its content. That way, at dramatic moments you will be able to say, 'I know it's around here somewhere, I remember seeing it', and track down the correct rule in scarcely more than half an hour or so.

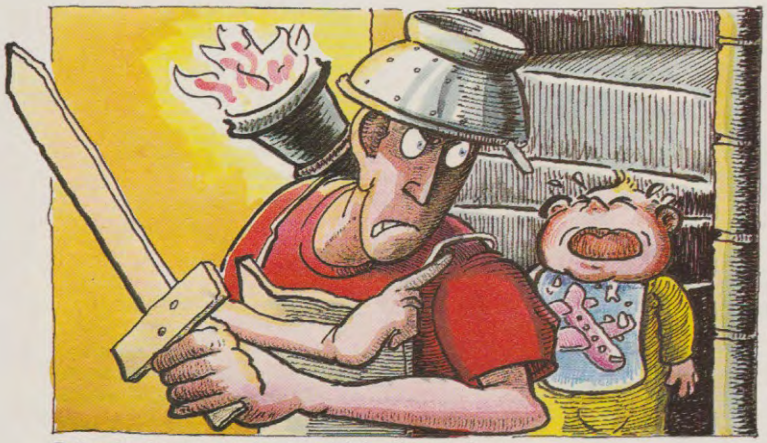
Your Game

their games. *There are many theories about how exactly these people achieve this dubious accolade, but* **Andrew Rilstone** *at last thinks he's cracked it. Now, with a little advice from us, you too can join this secret fraternity – the Society of Dire referees. Here are 10 simple rules to follow...*

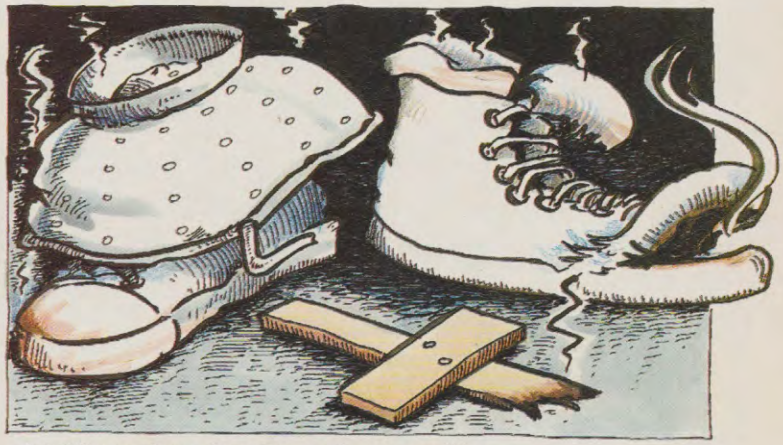
6 Never let your players forget they are in a fantasy game.
Make sure that the characters in your game say things like 'Hi! I'm an NPC, you can kill me if you like', or 'I'm a patron. Your scenario for this week is to describe things only in terms of game mechanics'. Never say something like, 'The mighty were-wombat's foul breath smells like a butcher's yard – it makes you vomit violently!' if you can say, 'The level 3 lycanthrope makes a type 2 breath attack and gives you one level of nausea for two turns' instead.

7 Stop in-character conversations.
If two player characters ever start an interesting in-character conversation during a roleplaying session that you're refereeing, don't let them get away with it. Make absolutely sure to interrupt their banter at the first possible opportunity you get. This rule is pretty self-explanatory really: whatever happens you don't want any dangerous roleplaying in your campaign, so don't give player characters the chance to devise anything you might not like.

8 Don't be prepared.
If you are running a game like RuneQuest, or any percentage-based system for that matter, make absolutely sure that you have a dice bag consisting entirely of six-sided dice. On the other hand, a game such as Champions is greatly enhanced if a player with a 20 dice energy-blast has to role a single D6 20 times. And remember: sharing one biro between six players greatly improves group solidarity and also helps to raise your tolerance threshold immeasurably.



9 Gaming is meant to be a social, family experience...
So make sure that you leave the TV on all the way through a gaming session. If possible, arrange for the family pet to be slobbering all over the gaming table. (Kittens or toddlers add immeasurably to the atmosphere of Cthulhu or Vampire!) If your partner or flatmates are not roleplayers, then invite them to join in and encourage players to bring their non-gaming girlfriends and boyfriends. Have a pile of comics or newspapers for the players to read when the game gets too exciting.



10 Kill your player characters as often as possible.
Character generation is one of the most rewarding parts of roleplaying. Players love creating fresh PCs. They love watching characters they have developed over weeks go to a senseless death. This experience is made even more intense if you can set up the scenario so they have no chance of escaping. A really good referee ought to be able to wipe out entire parties on a regular basis. If the players complain, you can mutter something to yourself about 'realism' and 'impartiality'.

THE OLD

Gamers with an interest in weapons technology should look out for *Guns! Guns! Guns!* (BTRC). This enables weapons to be designed from first principles at any Tech Level, then statted up for use in a whole range of systems.

Phil Masters rejects the tired SF clichés and sugge

There's a temptation for all referees to be lazy. If we can get away with the worlds and universes the games we run use, then there's no real need to change them. We make do. But for some really interesting games, it's work making that effort – change some basic principles in the game world and we can shock our players into having a better time. And one of the best things we can muck about with is the type of technology to be found in the gaming universe.

Why should we assume that the levels of technology in our campaign worlds mirror the technological paths that we ourselves have followed throughout history? Truth is, it needn't. There are plenty of interesting twists we can introduce which will radically alter the gaming universe, and make your campaigns more fun to run, and to play in. So, what kind of changes to technology can we make?

Different Bases

It's a good idea to come up with some radically different starting points. Early human beings mastered stone tools and fire, then moved on to smelt metals. Along the way, they also domesticated animals. But what alternatives were there?

Beginner's Biotech: Why use machines for tasks? After all, living things are more versatile, more widely available, and reproduce and repair themselves. The snag is, of course, that living beings are terribly tricky to manipulate successfully. Domesticating animals is difficult – only a few species will tolerate human control. However, given that animals can be bred and even genetically adapted for tasks, it is possible to imagine a technology based on organic life. The catch with this is that, unless one already has genetic engineering, the process is slow and limited.

In his *West of Eden* trilogy *(West of Eden, Winter in Eden* and *Return to Eden),* Harry Harrison places biotechnology in the hands of the Yilane – intelligent dinosaurs. The Yilane are ancient, patient and group-minded, with an ignorance and fear of fire that limits them severely. However, they have been intelligent for a long time, they breed ships and microscopes as well as communications and recording devices.

Could humans possibly do something similar to this?

New Age

some inspired alternative technologies for RPGs...

RPG writers love the idea of technomagic – see *Bloodshadows* (West End Games), *GURPS Time Travel Adventures* (Steve Jackson Games) and *Magitech* (TSR).

Imagine an old-established society with a lot of domesticated animals, many specially bred. With 'equipment' taking years to grow, such a society would tend to take the long view. Medicine would be quite advanced, because biological principles would be well understood. This needn't be a Green Utopia, however; if living things are tools, they can easily be manipulated and discarded at whim.

Chemical Reactions: Humans have used 'practical chemistry' for thousands of years – cookery, herbalism, and metal and glass working. But what if early humans had discovered a few more interesting tricks?

This could mean a world of witches and magicians, with powerful individuals wielding an arsenal of drugs and pyrotechnics, and adventurers seeking out new herbs or curious mineral deposits. Warfare could get messy, with the deadliest weapons being either subtle and vicious poisons, or Greek Fire – crude napalm. Such a society might arise on a world with a rich ecology, but limited metal deposits and few domesticable animals.

It's Electric: There is evidence that the ancient Babylonians discovered electroplating, and used it to decorate metalwork. If this is true, then it will have been a crude, ad hoc art – dunking metals in clay pots of naturally-occurring acids, and finding that certain combinations leave thin but durable coatings of gold on bronze. However, the Babylonians had made a start.

Suppose a bright craftsman had realised that primitive batteries could be linked together in series. Early versions of this trick would have limited use, but they could be improved with time, and eventually another clever fellow might bring the batteries together with a lodestone, and discover the motor and dynamo. Meanwhile, tinkering with electrochemistry could produce a number of usefully pure metals and materials, some of which could feed back to improve the new industry.

It's unlikely that any of this would do very much for the early Iron Age, but eventually it might create a minor industrial revolution. Imagine ancient Rome with the wealthy areas lit by crude arc lights (with generators powered by slaves or draft animals), and later, medieval lords communicating with crystal radios… →

Alternate Histories

For an RPG set in a magically-powered Steampunk world, take a look at *Tales of Gargentihr* (Sanctuary Games).

Moving forward, it's possible to imagine all sorts of different histories throwing up variant technologies. There are a number of stock 'alternates' – Rome never rising or never falling, the Arab Conquests continuing, the Reformation being defeated. However, these tend to be shown as having little influence on types of technology; the Industrial Revolution may come early or be suppressed, but it nevertheless involves steam railways. That might not be the whole story, though.

Chinese Minds: The culture with the most impressive set of scientific and technological innovations to its name is China. For much of history, the Chinese were the most advanced society on Earth. Why didn't they conquer everyone else with intricate hand-crafted bamboo machines and military rockets?

There are a number of explanations. A lot of China's strength was based on a stable, conservative approach. Their system of peasants and bureaucrats was very robust, but it certainly didn't encourage Western-style progress – science and technology were seen as being trivial. The Chinese had just about everything they wanted within their borders, and generally despised both merchants and foreign barbarians alike. So an alternate history in which the Chinese became world conquerors would probably have to diverge pretty early on in the proceedings, to enable a different kind of attitude to develop. Nonetheless, it could be interesting.

"Telepathy might replace radio, with telekinetically-assisted travel – 'We have lift-off, all Espers are go...'"

Gunpowder Gods: Explosives could be the key to such a Chinese history. They are not very hard to make; the Chinese discovered gunpowder, and even used it in war, but they never found it quite useful enough. Effective guns were invented – in slow stages – when they travelled west. But one favourite science-fiction theme is the time or space traveller introducing gunpowder into warfare.

It might be interesting to try to imagine what different historical cultures could have done with it. The Assyrians would doubtless have blasted down the gates of rival cities, while the Romans would have wielded heavy-barrelled muskets as efficiently as they did spears. A really off-beat history might give gunpowder to the Mayans, enabling them to build a strong, militaristic, stone-age empire. When the Conquistadors arrived, they might be faced with something they couldn't conquer; indeed, once equipped with captured European ship designs, the Mesoamericans might even take the war back to Europe...

An Early Revolution

Hellenistic Heroism: As every schoolchild knows, Hero of Alexandria invented a simple steam engine (as well as pneumatic and surveying devices) in the first century AD, and other Greeks and Romans were comparably ingenious. The Romans, diligent practical engineers, also had simple mass production. This raises the possibility of the Industrial Revolution coming 1,500 years earlier.

The question is whether Roman metallurgy could have produced robust and efficient enough machines, or the Roman economy paid for them. Furthermore, Hero's steam engine was hardly as efficient as Watt's. However, Roman legions wielding mass-produced crossbows, backed up with steam-powered canal boats, make an interesting image.

Steam Power: 'Steampunk' is a loose category of recent SF and fantasy – the SF flavour mostly depicting 19th century technology, from when the Industrial Revolution really hit its stride, developing even more spectacularly than it actually did. The cast iron, polished brass, steam-powered technology of that era can be stylish stuff.

The most meticulously developed 'Steampunk Tech' world appears in *The Difference Engine,* by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling. In this story, political changes in the early 19th century enable Charles Babbage to complete his mechanical computers. This in turn enables the creation of a ruthless, computerised meritocracy in the Victorian age. For an example of a steampunk/20th century gameworld, see the Steampunk feature, by Cameron Winstanley, in **arcane** 6.

Magic and the Mind

In most fantasy games, magic produces the same, useful effects (almost) every time. However, we have another name for systems that produce predictable results: science – and technology manipulates this. Similarly, there is the idea of Powers of the Mind – Psionics. Psi stories are popular in SF, although they are beginning to look as fantastic as magic these days; writers use psi the way that fantasy authors use spells – for whatever the plot demands. But psionics are seen as scientific. So perhaps a world with game-style magic or psi would develop a pseudo-industrial society.

Combining Paths

It's easy to imagine two or more future paths actually coming true, for example genetically-adapted humans could use nanotech to build Big Dumb Objects. In fact, this may be the most likely way that things happen – or parts of several paths may combine with other developments that we can't even imagine yet.

The snag with this, from a gamer's point of view, is that the world becomes so complex and alien that the referee can't keep track. Players alternate confusion and frustration with finding new, logical solutions to problems that the ref missed, thus wrecking every plot. However, if you feel up to attempting a fully-detailed, multiple-tech future good luck!

Sophisticated Medievalism: Imagine a world with the appearance of medieval sword-and-sorcery – but a second glance reveals complications, elements that function like technology. For example, wars are fought with squadrons of flying carpets which act like helicopter gunships, and those towering, crenellated castles have magically-provided hot and cold running water.

It may well be that, logically, medieval feudalism wouldn't last long in this situation. With enhanced agriculture and transport, less of the population would have to work on the land, while magic weapons would remove the power of the armoured knight to oppress the peasantry, better even than the longbow or the gun. An interesting game might be built around the struggle between feudalism and mercantilism, with mages aiding both sides, or demanding noble rank of their own, and different factions (including the Darklord and his yuppie necromancers) seeking to encourage or prevent civil war. On the other hand, it may be more fun to abandon such logic, and simply assume that magic somehow permits feudalism to hang on indefinitely.

A Strange New World

Life as we know it: Technomagic might produce a world 'like' the present day, with cars and aircraft propelled by elemental spells, television sets looking suspiciously like giant crystal balls and so on. Alternatively, telepathy might replace radio, with telekinetically-assisted travel – "We have lift-off, all Espers are go..."

Such worlds are often played for laughs – *The Flintstones* with magic – but this isn't compulsory; they could just as easily involve a lot of foul necromantic mill-towns, Big Brother watching you through scrying magic, and research mages in lab coats sacrificing small furry animals (and the odd human for that matter) on the altar of thaumaturgic progress.

A New Age of Wonders: A particularly sophisticated form of Technomagic or Psi-Tech could be very spectacular, with machines empowered and controlled by glowing crystals, enchanted airships flying silently between mile-high towers, and buildings telekinetically sculpted from 'miracle' metals. Campaigns in such a world would owe far more to space opera than sword-and-sorcery fantasy, though – the *Lensman* books might be a good place to start. (You can still have questing knights – they would just look a bit more like Obi-Wan than Lancelot.)

Power to the People

Important People: If magic or psionics can only be worked by sentient beings, then certain people become extremely important in the game. What might this result in? A new feudalism or a caste system? The 'powered' folk might become the rulers, or be organised in some kind of guild with strict rules, or alternatively they might be used as specialist servants. (Or the situation might be a mixture, a *Babylon 5*-style Psi Corps, say, apparently bound by rules but actually greedy for power, and oppressing the less powerful psis.) Such social tensions could make for excellent game plots.

A variation on this is the idea of Ultimate Slaves, which is especially popular in psi stories. In this situation, talented individuals are conscripted and carefully controlled. This provides plenty of roleplaying opportunities, albeit in an angst-prone, adolescent sort of way. ("I'm special, and I'm persecuted!")

Different Futures

Moving on further, let's examine how technology might evolve from the situation we know today...

"Genetically engineered weapons could get especially nasty – just think of the *Alien* movies."

Sculpted Flesh: Biotechnology and genetic engineering feature in many imaginary futures, if only as a part. What, though, if they became the linchpin of progress, solving every problem more effectively than crude mechanics?

Although writers have imagined a 21st century of modified animal servants and semi-sentient tools, useful genetic engineering is likely to take a while to develop. DNA is, in effect, a set of complex, disorganised assembly instructions, with many irrelevant passages and footnotes crossed out, all written in shorthand. Nonetheless, its potential is going to interest a lot of people.

Nanotechnology was originally the idea of a scientist, not an SF writer – see K Eric Drexler's *The Engines of Creation*.

More Relevant Fiction

Those of you with a general interest might like to try:
The Dragon Masters (Jack Vance): Another story of creatures selectively bred for specialised purposes.
Pasquale's Angel (Paul J McAuley): A Renaissance Italy in which Leonardo da Vinci becomes an inventor rather than an artist, and his fantastical machines work.

And those of you with more specific requirements might like:
Sexual Chemistry: Sardonic Tales of the Genetic Revolution **(Brian Stableford); Ribofunk (Paul Di Filippo):** for Biotech.

Queen of Angels (Greg Bear); The Diamond Age (Neal Stephenson); Aristoi (Walter J Williams): for Nanotechnology.

The **Ringworld books** and **A World Out of Time (Larry Niven); The Fountains of Paradise** and the **Rama** books **(Arthur C Clarke);** the **Orbitsville** trilogy **(Bob Shaw); The Time Ships (Stephen Baxter):** for Big Dumb Objects.

Schismatrix (Bruce Sterling): this isn't just about one technological future, it's about a clash between philosophies, each trying to ensure that their technology defines humanity's future.

Marooned in Realtime (Vernor Vinge): If you measure scientific progress, and plot graphs of the measures, they accelerate upwards. What happens when they go off the scale? This is the 'Singularity'.

A lot of 1940s and '50s SF, such as A E van Vogt's *Slan*, dealt with psionic characters and their problems. Marvel Comics' *X-Mutant* titles borrow the theme.

Things are already underway, with the Human Genome project preparing a map for explorers, and researchers trying to remedy genetic diseases. Next is likely to be the attempt to prevent problems by DNA surgery in the womb (leading to major ethical conflicts), along with minor modifications to animals and plants, making them useful sources of pharmaceuticals, and even, perhaps, transplantable organs.

Eventually, specially-created life-forms should become possible, although it will be a long time before these become anything other than minor modifications of familiar species. Whether humans will be the first or the last to be radically modified is an interesting question – there would be an advantage to making humans better able to live in space or underwater, but on the other hand, this is tinkering with human nature.

A few possibilities are fairly obvious, and appear in fiction, for example modified coral might be used for building. Eventually, the Biotech world could be full of modified people, semi-sentient animals, organic buildings and exotic pharmaceuticals.

A Biotech future could seem either horrific or wonderful. It could be filled with living, breathing, responsive wonders, although this would be achieved by taking a cold-blooded, ruthless approach to organic life. Genetically engineered weapons could get especially nasty – just think of the *Alien* movies. Of course, for game purposes it can be most interesting to display both nice and nasty aspects.

Engines of Creation: SF writers are currently very fond of nanotechnology – hypothetical machines constructed on a microscopic scale, probably able to replicate themselves, certainly with the power to manipulate individual cells, and perhaps even molecules. Such nanomechs could have countless uses, including medicine, along with manufacturing processes – weaving or sculpting on the molecular level.

The first nanomechs would probably serve highly specialised functions – surgery (destroying cancer cells, scrubbing out blocked arteries) or precision micro-manufacturing, for example. Nanotech replication would likely be limited, unreliable, and hedged around with regulations to avoid horrific runaways. Thus, nanomechs would be expensive, and most people might never encounter them. However, more experienced designers, and companies looking for markets, would lead to a spread, much as with microelectronics in recent decades. For example, high-purity, ultra-strong materials produced by 'weaver' nanos could first be used for specialised tools, then expensive body armour, then ordinary clothing.

As nanotechnology spreads, the use of nanomechs to manufacture other nanomechs would bring costs down. As nanos take over in hospitals, and people lose their fear (replacing it with over-confidence), a few expensive nanomachines would doubtless become available in shops, mostly as gimmicks – jewellery that changes colour on verbal command, say, or self-cleaning clothes.

With general public acceptance, and a library of design methodologies, nanotech could become ever more common – leading to its use for all kinds of illicit purposes such as spying, met with nanotech countermeasures. Eventually, every necessary task would seem to be performed by nanomechs, and the world would get very strange indeed.

"One danger would be anti-pollution laws becoming excuses for tyranny. PCs could be caught between corner-cutting industrialists and fanatical controllers."

Going Carefully: Gamers and SF writers have a natural love of high-energy tech, solving each problem by coming up with something bigger and better, and with strangely few troubles with power supplies. This is great fun, but 'green' ideas and pollution from modern industry make some people in the real world more cautious. A pessimistic reaction is to assume that society will be forced to slip backwards technologically, but it's also possible to imagine a future on careful, energy-efficient lines, with people learning to study the consequences of new ideas before using them – but not necessarily ignoring them.

Cautionary Measures

One version: At the end of the 20th century, economic depression forces industries to review their long-term policies, while global warming demands international action. (At first, some nations think that they are benefiting from the climatic changes, but the weather just becomes too unpredictable.) Eventually, people come to accept that big cars aren't necessities of life, and electronic communications expand (e-mail causes less pollution than a car journey). One danger at this stage – particularly good for game plots – would be anti-pollution laws becoming excuses for tyranny. PCs could become caught between corner-cutting industrialists and fanatical controllers.

With green measures in place, industry should learn more discrete techniques, while populations, encouraged by improved telecommunications, move away from cities. Low-key biotechnology could develop despite stringent controls – it might prove very useful for cleaning up old pollution. Satellites should remain important for communications, meteorology and pollution monitoring, but manned space flight might lapse somewhat.

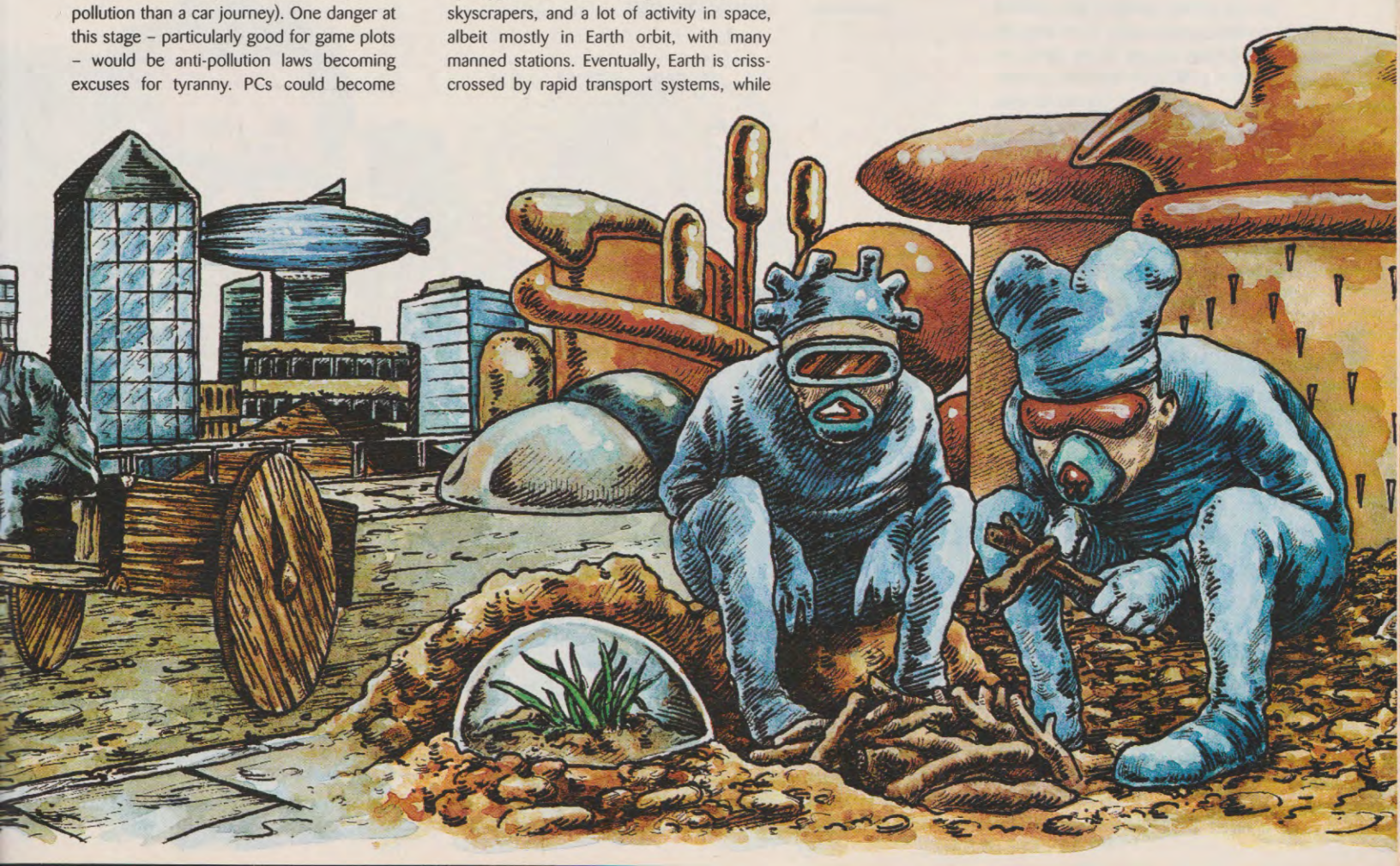
However, in time, discrete, elegant technologies can achieve as much as raw force. Fusion power-plants (not necessarily pollution-prone) could provide electricity to run electro-magnetic spaceship launchers and so on. Game plots could be based on conflicts between more and less cautious groups, and between Earth-based factions and developers who have moved into space, where pollution doesn't matter.

Big Dumb Objects: This term describes the subject matter of a number of SF books – Ringworlds, Dyson Spheres, giant starships and so on. So, what about a history in which human beings concentrate on large-scale engineering? The first stage could be marked by bigger and better bridges, tunnels and skyscrapers, and a lot of activity in space, albeit mostly in Earth orbit, with many manned stations. Eventually, Earth is criss-crossed by rapid transport systems, while the space stations link up with each other physically. The Moon is heavily mined, and bases are sited on Mars, which along with Venus may be terraformed. Eventually, space elevators are constructed – towers reaching from Earth to orbit. Some giant colony starships may also be built.

In time, geostationary orbit is occupied by a continuous ring – a wheel, with the space elevators as spokes. The asteroid belt and planets are heavily mined. Then, giant energy collectors are placed around the sun. Any starships built at this point are 'microworlds', capable of supporting huge populations indefinitely.

Thus, the solar system becomes a giant building site and large objects are moved around with startling enthusiasm (any accidents could get extremely messy). Ultimately, a Ringworld or Dyson Sphere may be wrapped around the sun – details depend on developments in materials science, gravity control and so on. Colonies in other solar systems are, by now, performing similar feats there. And adventurers have very large areas to explore, as well as a long history of outrageous scientific projects to provide them with all kinds of problems.

Some RPGs set out to emulate classic 'pulp' SF, where everything technological just keeps getting bigger and flashier, with the occasional radical invention. This is not realistic, although it is almost possible to explain it with a parallel history diverging around 1945, when the first seeds of modern information technology and miniaturisation were sown. See *GURPS Lensman* (Steve Jackson Games).



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Soap opera mig
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Many roleplayers despise soap operas. "We get enough of the real world every day," they cry. "The last thing we want is more of it shoved down our throats for entertainment! Why do you think we play fantasy games in the first place?"

You can see their point. As with all speculative fiction, roleplaying allows us to examine the human condition objectively, to learn from mistakes our fictional characters make so that we may perhaps deal with adverse situations in our own lives a little better.

Hang on, though. Isn't that just what soaps are supposed to do? Some say films are better suited to comparison with RPGs. They are occasionally epic and are often based in fantasy worlds. Well, my Oxford dictionary has this to say about epic: "(Poem) narrating continuously achievements of some hero(es)". Provided you can accept Frank Tate as a hero, I'd say a soap fits this description better than *Braveheart*.

As for the fantasy setting, sure, most soaps are based in the real world, but everyone knows that no single council square could suffer as much mishap and tragedy as Albert Square, with one disaster piling on top of another. The world these characters inhabit is probably more fantastic than Middle-Earth.

But we willingly suspend our disbelief at yet another plane crash, or a long-lost love-child turning up out of the blue, not because we're gullible but because we know it will create conflict. And conflict is what excites us in both drama and roleplaying. Do we ever watch *Coronation Street* for 30 minutes of humdrum in which nobody has any problems? No. Do we ever see half an hour of Jimmy Corkhill twiddling his thumbs? Need I go on? And a quick word about *Star Trek*. Sorry, soap haters, but effectively *Star Trek* is a soap. So is *Babylon 5, Deep Space Nine, The X Files, Robotech* and *Dr Who*. They all feature the prime elements: a core of diverse characters, each with quirks; extraordinary events and coincidences; conflict between the characters' personalities and a focus on their personal relationships. That's why *Star Wars* was dubbed 'space opera'.

You may have already been inspired by some of the devices employed in these series, but let's break them down and see what we can steal – I mean learn.

"Have principles, desires and standards. Dammit, fall in love!"

Vampire: the Masquerade has been made into a soap opera entitled *Kindred: the Embraced*. The Aaron Spelling-produced show has been dubbed Vampire 90210 by fans.

1. Extraordinary things happen to heroes

They have to. That plane just *happened* to crash on *Emmerdale;* the Enterprise just *happened* to wander into the middle of a war at its peak. Make sure your PCs are where the action is. If they've unwittingly gone astray, bring the action to them (unless they're supposed to be detecting a trail). The PCs should always be at the centre of the action simply because we expect it. We are telling this story because it's interesting, so we are forgiven a certain amount of coincidence and convenient timing.

It's not just TV companies that produce soap operas. The great majority of superhero comics face similar problems to soaps – because the series never ends, the heroes must face an endless sequence of ever-more threatening trials and challenges. *X-Men* is probably the best example.

2. Conflict is good

How interesting would Max and Patricia be if they never bickered or disagreed? The last thing your party wants is for everyone to have the same attitudes. Perhaps the fighter (whose wife was murdered by an evil man-devil) worships a nature god and believes that destroying plant life for anything other than harvest is sacrilege. He and the wizard have a long-standing feud over the use of herbs in spells. Then the fighter discovers the only way to kill that man-demon is to cast a ritual spell on his sword using the energy from a 500 year-old oak tree. This is extreme, but hopefully you can see the potential for conflict.

illustration by Stephen Lillie © arcane

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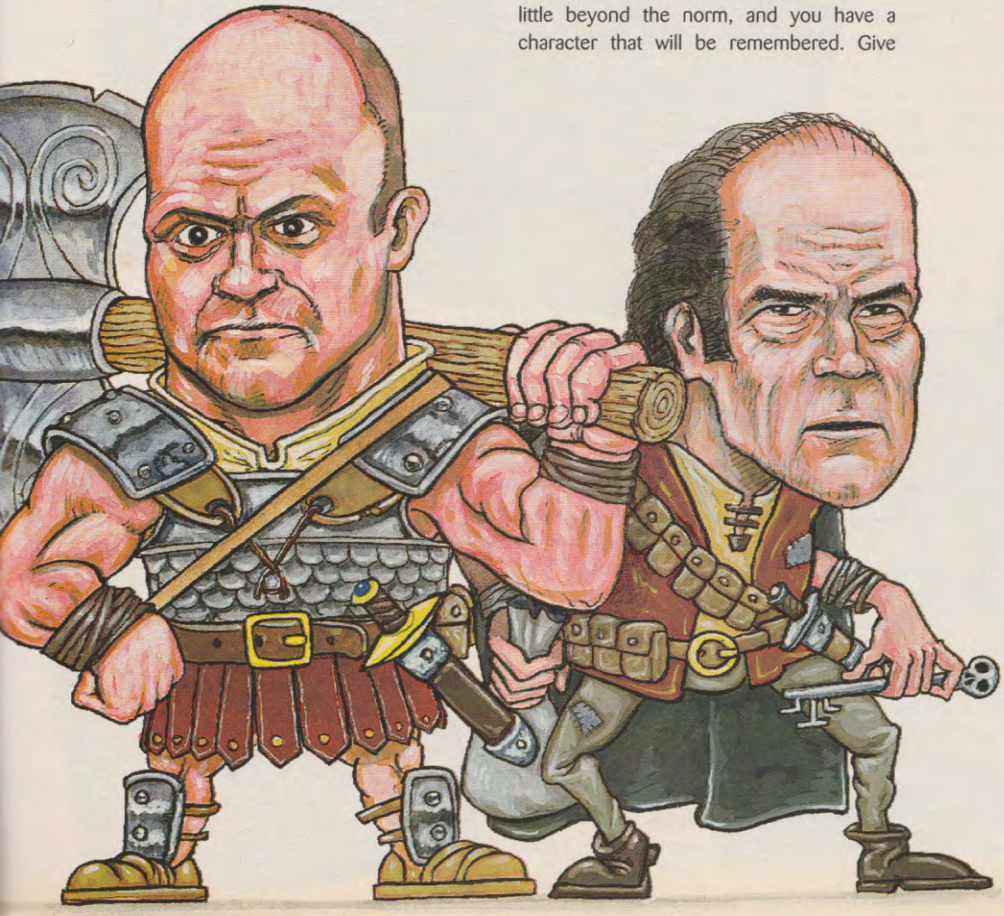


3. Background

Or, what did you do before you were a trollslayer, daddy?

Character histories should never ever be skimped on. Some games come with a history generator (for example, *CP2020's* lifepath), and others make your history an essential part of character generation (for example, *Everway* and *Vampire!).* And this is definitely A Good Thing.

Experience, you see, maketh the man. Your character's background is invaluable to both you and your referee. It gives you much more of an idea about how your character will react in a given situation, what his opinions are and exactly how he formed them. It helps your referee allude to your past, to ensure that he can keep on making your character tick, and perhaps even set up meetings with old friends (or enemies, for that matter).

Contrary to a popular myth, soap opera writers are highly respected. The amount of plotting required to keep people watching day in, day out is formidable, especially combined with juggling all those characters in your head.

4. No character is incidental

Remember the new barber in Albert Square with his mysterious cellar and taste for humbugs? Stuck in your mind, didn't he? All it takes is one interesting twist on a stereotype, or one bizarre quirk stretched a little beyond the norm, and you have a character that will be remembered. Give your minor NPCs life – imagine a solo who shines his boots every minute he's not working. Quirks like this are great fun: when the PCs find that solo dead and wearing dirty boots, they'll know something sinister was afoot (sorry).

5. The things we do for love

Eddie lost his house for it; Frank lost everything for it; and Don lost his foot because of it.

People sometimes follow their heart instead of their brain. Remember, you are trying to portray as real a character as possible, and real people have all kinds of different emotions. EMP shouldn't be the stat you shove anything that's left over into. Have principles, desires and standards. Dammit, fall in love! And if you're a referee, give your players someone suitable to fall in love with, even if it is only a stereotypical Ripley clone. Have them fall out of love from time to time, too. Affairs, gossip, scandal, jealousy, competition, manic fits of depression – this stuff is the mainstay of scriptwriters (especially Animé), and characters just can't get enough of it.

"Affairs, gossip, scandal, jealousy... characters just can't get enough of it."

6. Pile it on

Despite a soap's supposed realism, the problems of Jimmy Corkhill or Liz McDonald are probably many more than yours or mine, so keep at 'em. After Jezret the Valiant discovers he's Prince of the neighbouring realm he's been crusading against, let him discover his fiancé in flagrante with the low-life thief who cheated him out of his wealth three years ago. Then, on his way home, have him meet a long-lost childhood friend who has just finished his wizard's apprenticeship and is travelling to this land in search of the mystical Orb. Pile it on. Thick.

Take note of the amount of chance meetings which later become significant in soaps. See how minor characters are identified by just one or two quirks. And next time you come across the continuing exploits of a group of characters who encounter danger at every turn, where even major characters die and new ones are drafted in, ask yourself: is this a soap or a game?

Forging Alliances

Alliances *is hot, so you need hot combos to use in your duels with* Alliances *cards.* Paul Pettengale's *got a few tricks up his sleeve...*

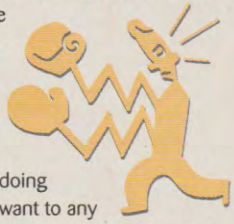
Fish Food

Okay, here's the deal: the cost for Viscrid Drone's effect (kill target non-artifact creature) is a little high... Sacrifice a swamp *and* a creature? If you can handle losing swamps to satisfy the Drone's creature-hunger, why not use Spiny Starfish's special ability? It's only a 0/1 creature but it can regenerate at a cost of 1 blue mana. *And* each time it regenerates, a 0/1 creature comes into play. So... use the Starfish as a blocker whenever your opponent attacks with a creature, regenerate it to get a 0/1 creature, then sacrifice that newbie monster to fuel (along with the swamp), the Drone's ability, thus killing the monster your opponent attacked with!

Viscrid Drone
1
Summon Homarid
: Sacrifice a creature and a swamp to bury target non-artifact creature.
: Sacrifice a creature and a snow-covered swamp to bury target creature.
Not all of Terisiare's flooding was natural....
1/2
Illus. Heather Hudson
Spiny Starfish
2
Summon Starfish
: Regenerate
At the end of any turn in which Spiny Starfish regenerated, put a Starfish token into play for each time it regenerated that turn. Treat those tokens as 0/1 blue creatures.
0/1
Illus. Alan Rabinowitz

I'll Take You All On

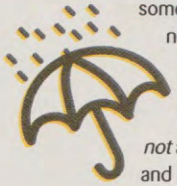
The problem with the Come Smell My Breath combo (opposite) is that the Elvish Bard ends up as toast. There is a way to perform a similar trick, killing plenty of opposing creatures and ensuring that your own single attacker remains unscathed. It's *very* expensive, and it's an unlikely three-card combo, but what the Hell... Cast Balduvian War-Makers, a 3/3 creature with Rampage: 1 and Trample which can attack on the turn it comes into play. Then attack with it. Now cast Melee, which enables you to make sure that your opponent blocks with everything he's got, and *then* cast Undergrowth. The latter card prevents all creatures from dealing damage except red ones (providing you pay a red and two colourless mana cost). What happens? Assuming the opponent is not using any red creatures, but has, say, six others, the War-Makers storm in doing a total of 8 damage, distributed any way you want to any of your opponent's creatures. Yes, it's expensive, but it's certainly fun!



Undergrowth
Instant
No creatures deal damage in combat this turn. If you pay 2 in addition to the casting cost, Undergrowth does not affect red creatures.
"It is the work of sorcery. Burn it!" —Taaveti of Kelsinko, Elvish Hunter
Illus. Pat Morrissey
Balduvian War-Make
Summon Barbarians
Rampage: 1
Balduvian War-Makers can attack the turn it comes into play on your side.
"We send our best to battle, but every man, woman, and child will stand against Varchild's butchers." —Lovisa Coldeyes, Balduvian Chieftain
3/3
Illus. Mike Kimble

Melee
Instant
Cast only on your turn during combat before defense is chosen. Choose how attacking creatures you control are blocked; all defense must be legal. After declaring blocking, untap any unblocked attacking creature. Treat those creatures as though they had not attacked.
Illus. Dameon Willich

Dancing In The Rain



Æther Storm, to put it bluntly, is a bit of a bugger. I mean, it prevents all summon spells from being cast (unless someone's willing to get rid of it by sacrificing 4 life). The new *Alliances* Errand of Duty bypasses the Storm, however, because, even though by casting it you end up with a 1/1 creature in play (which you can then pump up with, say, a Divine Transformation), it's *not* a summon spell. So, load your deck with four of these and enough Æther Storms to prevent your opponent from getting any creatures into play, and you've still got a way of getting your own creatures nipping at his heels.

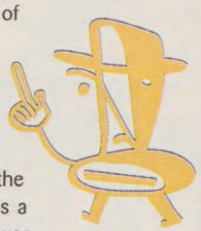
Æther Storm
Enchantment
No summon spells may be cast.
Errand of Duty
1
Instant
Put a Knight token into play. Treat this token as a 1/1 white creature with banding.
"Call every able sword to our side. Kjeldor will stand triumphant!"
—King Darien of Kjeldor
Illus. Julie Baroh

Venomous Breath
Instant
Elvish Bard
Summon Elf
All creatures able to block Elvish Bard do so. If this forces a creature to block more attackers than allowed, defending player assigns that creature to block as many of those attackers as allowed.
Illus. Susan Van Camp
2/4

Come Smell My Breath

A twist on the classic Thicket Basilisk/Lure combo. Take one Elvish Bard, a friendly looking lass who forces anything that can to block when she attacks, and get her into play. Imagine the look on your opponent's face when you attack with her and he can't believe it as his six or seven creatures all rush to block – because the Elf can only do 2 damage, he's probably thinking you're suicidal. Then cast Venomous Breath on the Elf, which kills all blockers at the end of combat, and watch your opponent's smile wane somewhat.

Order From Chaos



Chaos Harlequin is a great card – its power of just 2 means it's not susceptible to the effect of a Meekstone, and you can pump him up by +2/+0 by removing the top card of your library from the game for the cost of just 1 red mana. *But,* if that card turns out to be a land, the Harlequin gets -4/-0, so using the effect is a big gamble. Unless, that is, you first use Diabolic Vision – that enables you to look at the top five cards of your deck, taking one into your hand and replacing the rest in any order. So, providing you've got red mana to support, you can potentially throw away four non-land cards from the top of your deck, turning the Harlequin into a rather nasty 10/4. Ouch.

Diabolic Vision
Sorcery
Look at the top five cards of your library and put one of them into your hand. Put the remaining on top of your library in any order.
"I have seen the true path. I will warm myself by the fire—I will become the flame."
—Lim-Dûl, the Necromancer
Illus. Anthony Waters
Chaos Harlequin
Summon Harlequin
: Remove the top card of your library from the game. If that card is a land, Chaos Harlequin gets –4/–0 until end of turn; otherwise, Chaos Harlequin gets +2/+0 until end of turn.
Illus. Alan Rabinowitz
2/4

Next month...
...we preview Mirage, the new Magic stand-alone expansion. Don't miss it on Friday 9th August.
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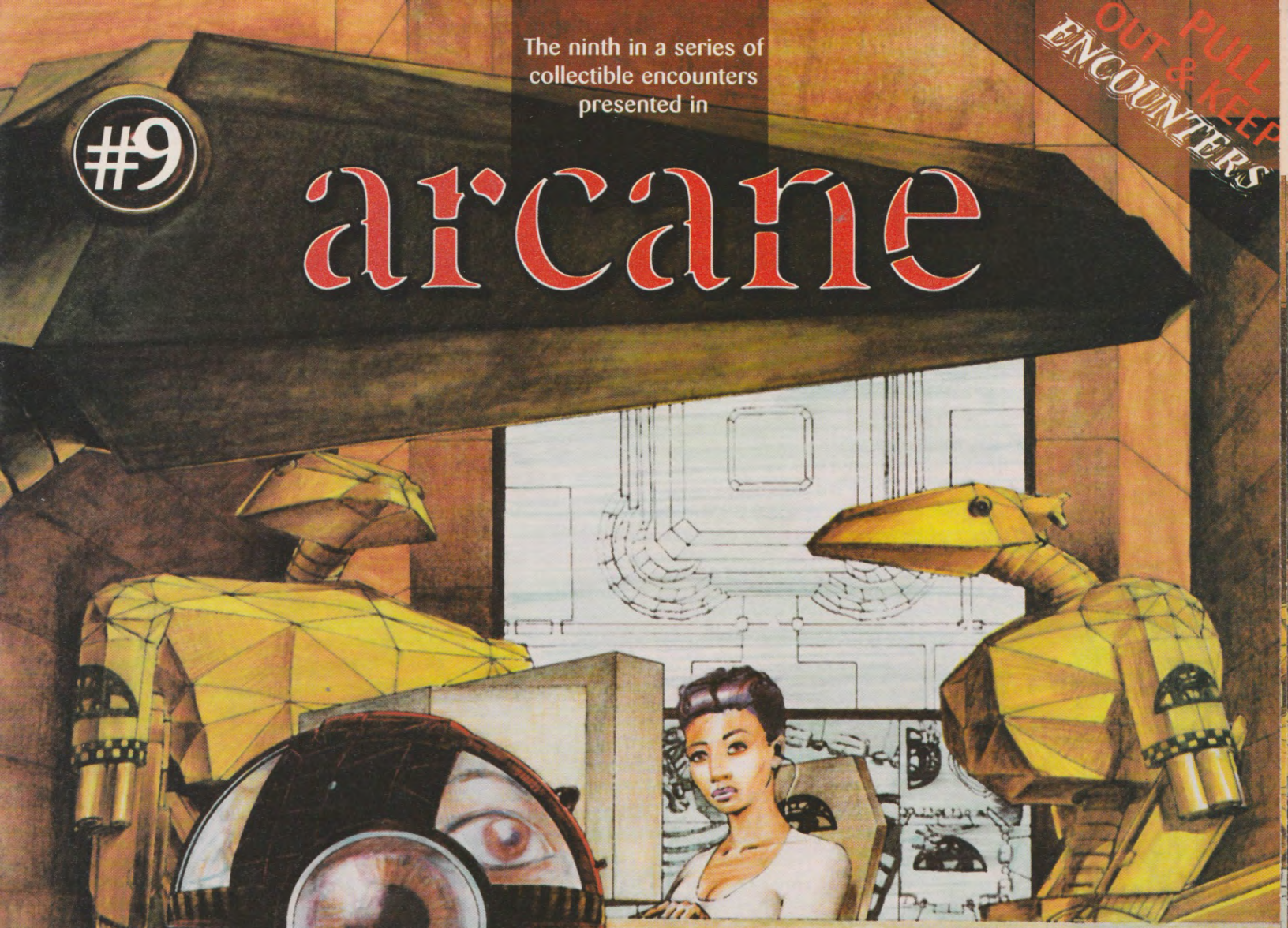
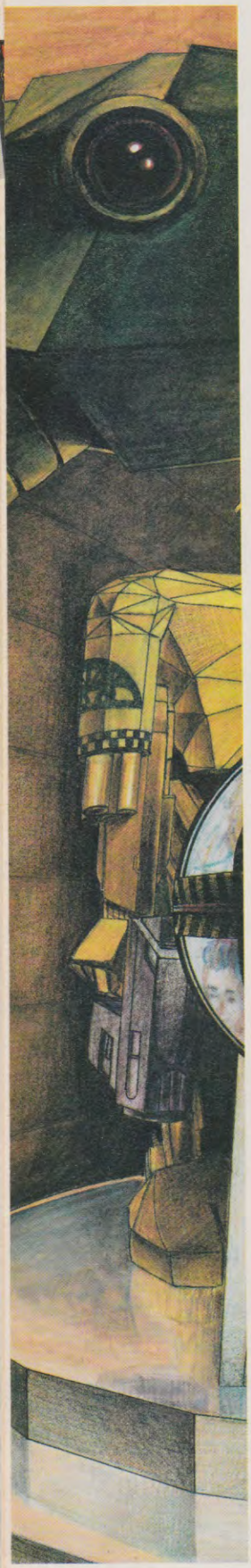


RACKMODULO INC.

You can have complete privacy, total anonymity, and you can get up to whatever you want inside the confines of the RackModulo complex. Providing, of course, you can afford it...

by Ken and Jo Walton and Graydon Saunders



arcane *proudly presents another 11-page encounter that you can use with any sci-fi or cyberpunk RPG.*

RACKMODULO INC.

Even with the coat, I'm cold.

It took two days, but a little bug climbed down from the roof of number four tower and laid a square millimetre of careful ceramic on the corner of module 8-6's window. It's perfectly clear to the eye, and the exact same refractive index as air – even the window washer will never know it's there. To the 3,000 angstrom x-rays the laser beside me is putting out, it's a quantum trap and a perfect mirror.

The laser whines and hisses and creaks, old and cold in its bath of liquid helium. The helium boils away, scavenged, replenished and recondensed, but the seals are old, too, and the clever membranes of the coat can't do anything about vapour in my lungs. Cold, the whole room, frost on the screen, the mirrors, white ice in the small bathroom sink.

Little pulses, quarter-nanosecond slugs of light not as long as the width of my hand. A cosmic-ray counter in the corner feeds random numbers to the stack of chips running the laser, so they leave with no pattern. Another stack of chips does fearsome statistics on the returning light, to see how the window rattles, ever so faint, with the motion of the air in the room behind.

Twelve hours worth of data, and coffee tastes like burnt grease. No water; the one working bathroom tap feeds the hose to the heat exchanger cooling the laser's helium bath. Nothing from the window but an endlessly repeating old recording. Behind that, a little chatter and a 60 hertz hum and an old style electromagnetic speaker stuck to the metal window frame somewhere, the statistics say with tape. Their hum matches my wall current perfectly, so it's probably a real speaker after all, not a spoof.

Whatever they have to hide in there, they've got a sense of humour about it. Database says the recording is 'The Chipmunks Sing the Best of Michael Jackson.'

The System

You're bound to notice that, even though we present character descriptions for the people you find in the RackModulo complex, we don't provide you with any stats. This is a deliberate decision – you're supposed to be able to use this encounter with pretty well any science fiction or cyberpunk RPG, and to provide stats for all of them would take up way too much space. That shouldn't be a problem for you – just make up the stats for these characters yourself. Same goes for other 'system' details – make them up to fit your campaign.

Advertisement

You're a corporation, or part of a government, a small business or just possibly an individual researcher. You're looking for workspace. You don't want to build your own with all the associated hassles. You don't want the bother of dealing with environmental laws and all the individual utility corps. But you do want somewhere secure and attractive, where you can work without anyone looking over your shoulder. You're busy people, you want to get on with your line of work, whatever that may be. You want the peace of mind that comes with knowing that your business is nobody's business but your own. And you can afford to pay for it.

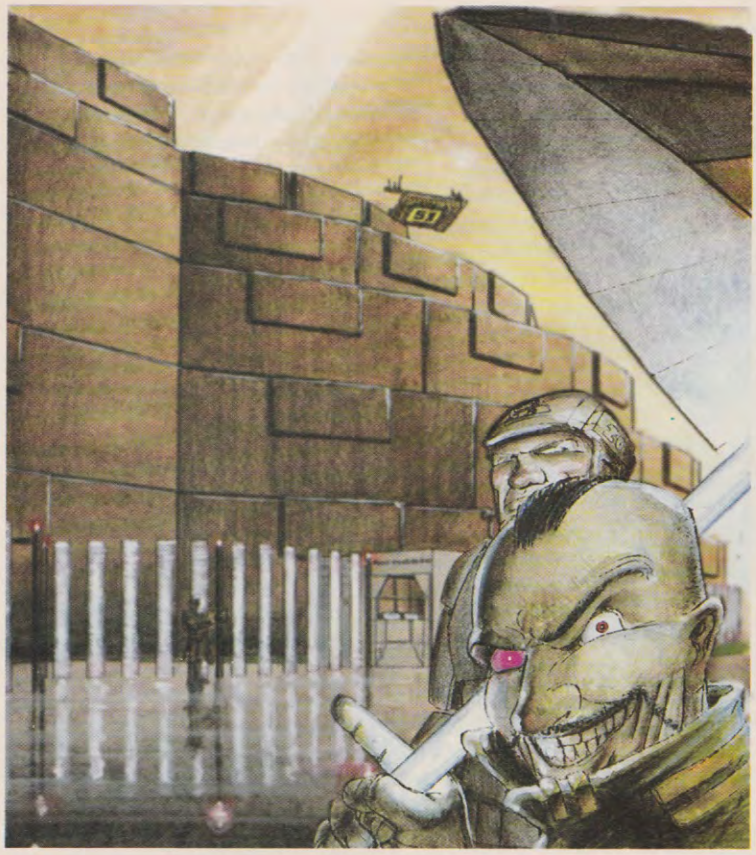
RackModulo can help

We own thousands of modules, set in delightfully landscaped parkland. Each module is safe, secure and utterly private. RackModulo Inc. is not interested in violating the confidentiality of our customers. We don't care what you're doing, we just want to help you get on with it. Your business is not our business. We don't even care who you are. The interior of your impermeable module is yours to do what you want with, as long as you pay your single bill. All utilities, including data feed, full environmentally effective waste reclamation and excellent reactive security, are included as part of the RackModulo package.

For more details about the service we can provide, including details about your nearest RackModulo Park, click here. Offer subject to appropriate credit. If you have to ask, you probably don't want to know.

RackModulo Inc. sells governments, corporations and individuals peace of mind; it provides utterly private workspace. This space comes in the form of building frames that serve as racks for industrial activity modules. It also provides full utility hookups (including broadband data feeds) and a very simple non-pollution requirement.

The client gets two extremely important things: complete privacy and comprehensive anonymity. As long as nothing leaks from the module and nothing from the very short 'can't cope' list is dumped into RackModulo's waste processing system, absolutely no-one will express the least bit of interest in what's being done in any particular module. And to get all this, all you have to do is keep paying your exorbitantly high rent. Naturally, such services do not come cheap. RackModulo quite happily accepts anyone as a customer, just as long as they can prove they can pay...



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The Complex

Physically, RackModulo complexes follow a common plan: a 250m by 250m square base, set with industrial parkland, with a stepped series of mega-modules forming a pyramid. These mega-modules each houses a series of rented modules within, of varying sizes, from small office-sized ones to huge research centres. Each module has its own elevator access and plumbing connections. The 2m wide tubes that hold the elevators are filled with an inert gas – light comes in, but no noise and no information. Access to the elevators is via a maze of twisty passages, all alike. A system in the frame office opens the necessary doors and monitors progress.

The Waste Processing Centre

In the centre of the complex is the buried waste processing centre. There are eight separate processors, running in parallel. The ground over the processors is attractively landscaped wooded parkland. RackModulo prides itself on its green environmentally-friendly image. The facility has considerable passive security; the walls are very thick synthacrete, and access is very tightly controlled at the bottom of the 8m elevator shaft – anyone can take the elevator down. However, getting back up, for unauthorized visitors, can be extremely challenging.

The Modules

RackModulo makes all the module exteriors, and you must buy or lease the exterior from it when you rent space. This exterior is extremely tough, resolutely corrosion proof and intensely soundproofed. It is possible to rent as many modules as you want as long as you can afford them. The interiors may be outfitted in any way you please, and RackModulo Inc. will not express concerns about your decisions. The only thing it insists on is the zero emissions requirement. Everything leaving a module must go through either RackModulo's ventilation and filtration system, or out of the standard 50cm disposal pipe hookups. This requirement is contractually enforced with a vengeance, and the ventilation system runs at less than the ambient atmospheric pressure, which prevents even accidental external venting.

So, what's going on in there?

Anything you like.

Anyone who wants a little privacy and a straightforward working environment can be a RackModulo customer. There are corporate customers, both overt and covert, private researchers who are able to afford the steep leasing fees and a number of medium security businesses – patent lawyers, private detectives and data retrieval experts. There are also medical facilities ranging from the entirely legal and proper to the completely unlawful, various light industrial customers – chip fabrication, biologics and anything else you can grow in a small vat or want to keep quiet – a number of hackers, techs and weirds (most of whom live with their work, whatever that may be) and any number of black projects – governmental, industrial or private. A RackModulo module is definitely the perfect place to conduct research into germ warfare, neurotoxins, or just to keep the files for a distributed infiltration attempt.

Research tends to be something that can be done by a small team – seldom more than eight people – and the topic investigated can be anything that will fit. Very specific topics are the norm.

Getting in: Ways and Means

RackModulo Inc. runs a large groundline data feed into the complex. It surfaces in the buried, highly secure, reprocessing centre office, and from there cables in well-armoured conduits snake outwards to the four module frames. The cables are labelled, but unfortunately in cryptic codes that only RackModulo's security and maintenance devices can make any sense of. The actual customer files (which are in fact surprisingly thin, essentially a credit reference and a leasing history) are maintained entirely off-line. There are duplicate copies of the customer files in all four frame offices, in destruction-rigged filing cabinets. There's also a set in the central office, as well as duplicate sets in the RackModulo corporate headquarters.

Asking People

You could always try the good old-fashioned solution. You can attempt to bribe a disaffected or greedy worker, make friends with a RackModulo maintenance tech, or spend some time doing a lot of background investigation on a known researcher. This approach works fairly well, so long as you have enough time on

your hands and RackModulo's general security overview doesn't notice you.

Information Gathering Devices

You might want to try using bugs and taps on the datalines, or sending in tiny micromachines to observe. These are all possible options, but difficult. It's hard to get past the RackModulo front desk, and the use of such a device on the highly impervious outside of a module is impractical, so it has to be an inside job of some description.

Interrogation of the Principals

This ranges from attempts to make friends through to good old-fashioned kidnapping followed by chemical interrogation. It can certainly get you some good information, but it's extremely risky. Hardly anyone can be a RackModulo customer without having at least a little paranoia in their personality, and the effective forms – chemical or sorcerous interrogation – tend to be wildly illegal and you need to be prepared for some interesting consequences.

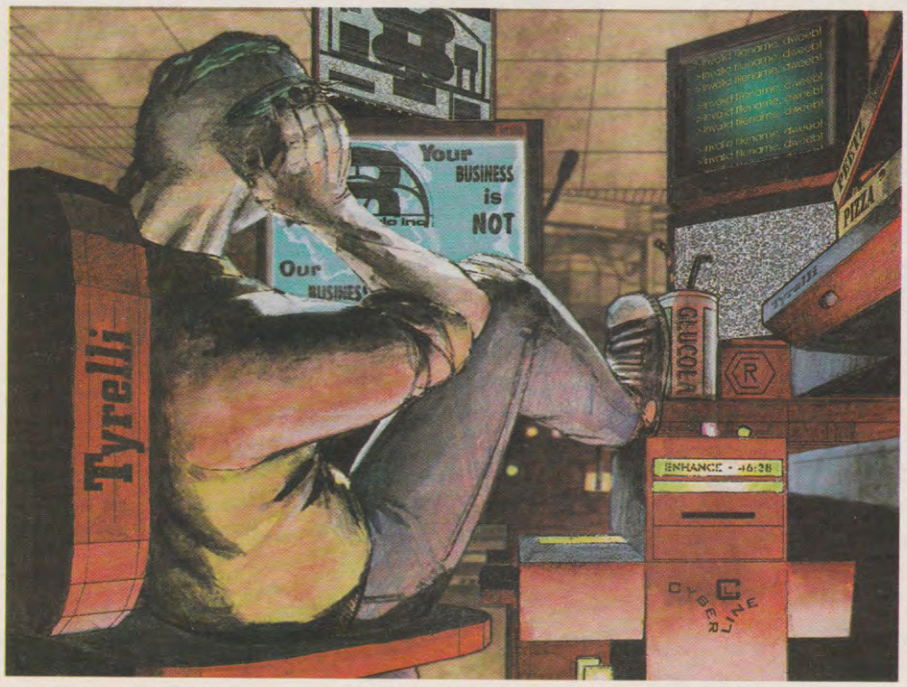
Sorcery

In a world where magic really does work, RackModulo's sorcerous protections are every bit as good as the physical ones. This means that they can be bypassed, but not without extreme care, competence, a degree of forethought and detailed planning.

Security

One of the things that RackModulo Inc. is selling is privacy. It has a comprehensive passive security system throughout the complex, which extends everywhere except inside the customers' modules. If you want to have the players investigate a module customer on RackModulo's behalf, you should keep this information in mind – they will be extremely concerned to deny their involvement.

This security system has several components:



Passive

Despite the careful open look, everything in the RackModulo complex is made out of very tough composite and synthetic materials. It would, for example, take a good sized bomb made by someone who knows what they're doing to blow in the 'glass' doors to the module frame offices. All the cables are deeply buried in heavy conduits and the power supply is internal (solar from space receptor, nuclear reactor, or cable to the local utility – there is at least one backup power supply good for a couple of hours).

Reactive

RackModulo Inc. has a contract with a local security force, which is sure to be competent, but not exceptionally tough or particularly well armed. The security force is certainly good enough to deal with the typical street samurai, but unfortunately it's not up to handling armoured vehicles, combat cyborgs or major demons.

Module Security

Remember that the customers are paranoid, mostly. The relatively decent RackModulo security is there to keep the rabble out, but the typical customer will take steps on their own. It's important to think about this in advance – any competent lethal security is quite able to reduce an infiltrator it catches to 50 kilos of medical waste and a lingering bad smell. Make sure the players are fully aware of this, or else use less lethal options. They might get more than a bit grumpy with you if their characters consistently die in increasingly gruesome ways.

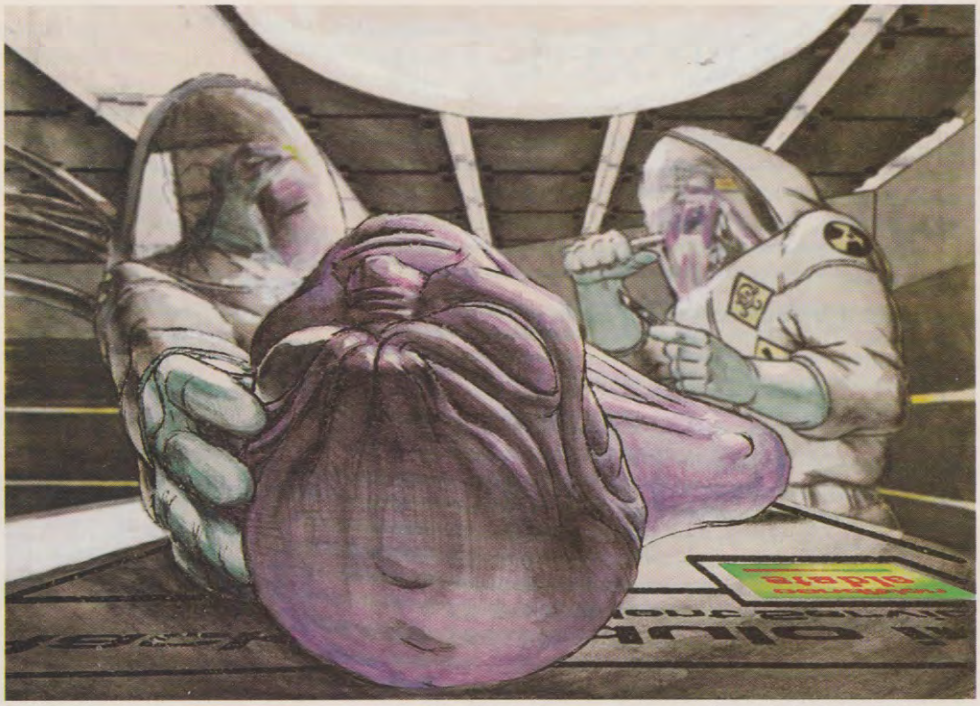
Automatic Machinery

If the machine doesn't think you belong there, things happen – this ranges from the door not opening to directional mines, biowarfare agents and neurotoxins. That's if the person responsible for the machine is in a straightforward mood. If they are sneaky, it lets you in, drugs you and then sticks you in storage until the owner comes back. Or maybe it lets you in, gasses you and grinds you to a paste – the central waste handling facility can certainly handle ground data-thief. Of course, they might also have use of an experimental subject for everything from a brand new recreational hallucinogen to a neurosurgical procedure.

Inadvertent

Think about how much trouble you could get into if someone let you walk around the shop floor in a steel mill. RackModulo's customers are industrial on a smaller scale, but there are any number of nasty things in a module. There might be 5,000 psi live steam in there, an electric arc furnace, plasma welders, annealing ovens full of boiling hydroflouric acid, or almost anything else you can think of. If the person attempting to sneak in and find stuff out doesn't know

what they're doing, they can get poisoned, burned, dissolved, subjected to carcinogens, mutagens or teratogens, electrocuted, or squished. Even if they manage to avoid all that, they might leave clear signs of their presence in broken, mis-set or tampered with equipment.



People

Jules Cavanagh

Jules Cavanagh is manager of the local RackModulo Park. He's fussy, legalistic and suave. He detests violence and will promise anything. He has useful, but not fast, connections. Jules is reliable, for a lawyer. He could sell condos in a waste dump to Greens, but he has no sense of humour. He's pretty reasonable at threat assessment, delighted by petty bribery, but buying him out would be expensive. RackModulo is not a particularly large corporation but its customers are, and they could do quite a bit in the way of vengeance.

Tara Smith

Tara Smith looks like a pretty ordinary secretary, but nothing could be further from the truth. She's chief of security and bad combat trouble in her own right – she can be a shapeshifted demon, an android or modified to the gills, but none of it shows and most of it is lethal. Jules doesn't know that she's security chief for the head office and has separate lines of communications. Jules has his own hired security and Tara handles the difficult and obscure stuff. If she gets on the phone (and the phone is built in) she can have about 30 seriously heavy bruisers there in very short order. She regards doing this as a failure of subtlety and skill because it would blow her cover to Jules. Unless, of course, that much force is required for the job.

Mike Rachet

Mike Rachet is in his fifties, and he is the gardener and groundskeeper for the central park section of the RackModulo complex. In a magic-has-returned world, Mike will have the appropriate magical abilities to be good with plants. In a normally technical world, Mike seems like a St. Francis type, but knows about organics and biochemistry. The parkland and the trees are maintained by the use of clever hi-tech molecular filters and other scrupulous anti-pollution measures. Anyone doing damage to the parkland has to worry about Mike doing something nasty to them – probably later, after he's tracked them down. His revenge is likely to be an effective toxin.

Anastasia Corbin

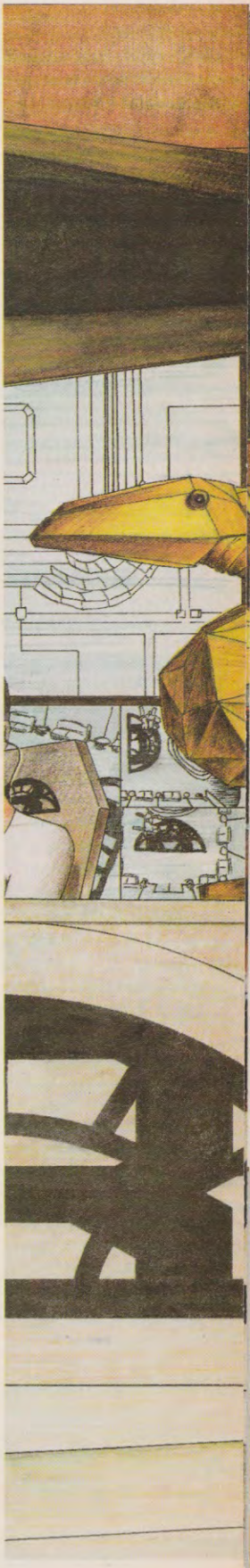
Dr Corbin is in her late thirties. She looks like a rather prim, slender, dour, 'hair tied back in a severe bun' stereotypical scientist. She is the nominal owner of module 8-5, in which is located a plutonium micromachining facility. Making enough noise to get her interested in her surroundings could be pretty bad – the kind of security she can call on is not going to be believed. She is also the most obvious person to talk to if you want to find out what's going on in 8-6 because the two modules are right next to each other. She has no reason not to tell you, but again, make her feel seriously threatened and you get to deal with the security of whomever it is that wants nuclear bombs in quantity.

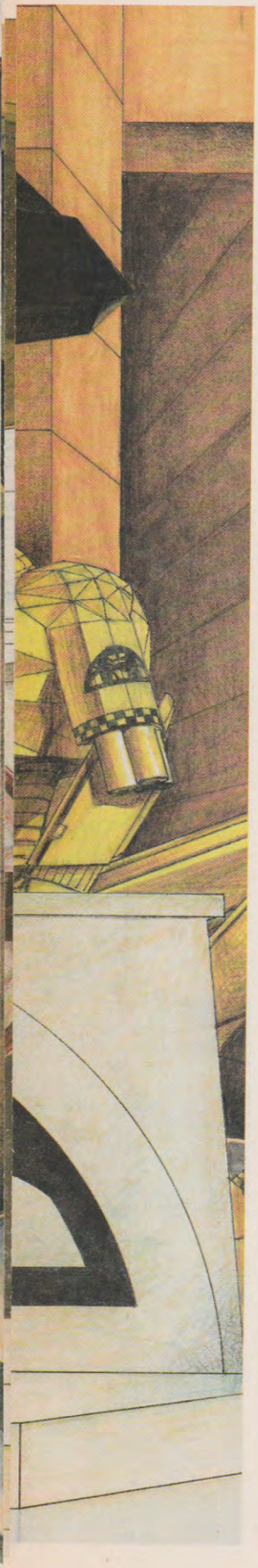
Doctor Locke

Dr Locke never gives a first name. He works out of module 8-6, performing body enhancements and modifications. He is definitely expensive, but does good work including the physiotherapy necessary to teach customers how to use their new cyberware. He also does a sideline in organic transplants. He appears to be in his thirties, but is actually somewhat older than that. He supplements his healthy practice in bodymods with biological experimentation, and is always on the lookout for new subjects for the various plagues and new surgical techniques he has developed. He may have some powerful corporate backers who know his secret and give him funds, hoping to benefit from his breakthroughs.

Zo-Zo

Zo-Zo is a lowlife, whose mirror shades are cracked and scratched. Anyone with street-smarts can tell at once that she is addicted to more than one street-fashionable drug. She might be any age from 12 to 30. With her slouching attitude and her long, sharp, visible knife she looks as if she can take care of herself without any problems at all. Zo-Zo can often be seen coming and going from module 8-6, most often late at night. She goes in with large bags, and leaves suspiciously without them. She has no bodymods, and thinks nothing of telling people how much she hates them. She is, in fact, supplying the Doctor with used cyberware, which she has cut from her numerous victims.





Adventure Seeds

Most of the time, nothing all that interesting happens at a RackModulo complex, at least not that anyone notices. There may be major breakthroughs happening in there weekly, but you don't hear the champagne corks. However, if there are breakthroughs happening, you can be relatively sure that someone wants to know about it.

Being Hired to Look Into It

Almost anyone might hire a skilled party to find out what is going on inside a specific module. It might be a rival – personal, corporate or inter-corporate. Or a government agency of some description – revenuers, the patent office, military intelligence, occupational health and safety. Or RackModulo Inc. itself, getting a little nervous about just what is going on in some module and wanting to do a little discrete checking. A curious data-thief may wonder if information worth stealing is in there somewhere. Or a customer of a specific business may want a verification of what they've been told about the state of their research. There might even be relatives, friends or loved ones of an employee or researcher prepared to pay to know what their nearest and dearest is up to in there. Or somebody with one of these reasons for investigating may have disappeared, and their friends and family might be interested in finding out what's become of them.

Specific Information

The usual way to become involved is to be hired to find out specific information or to obtain a specific object. In almost all cases, this can only be considered a success if it can be done anonymously. If it isn't done anonymously, probable responses range from being followed (tangibly, sorcerously or electronically), fed false information, being set up at the exchange (of course, they can always just get you to hand it over, and let you and your erstwhile employer argue about exactly where it went), to being subsequently assassinated or simply killed out of hand.

Being Paid

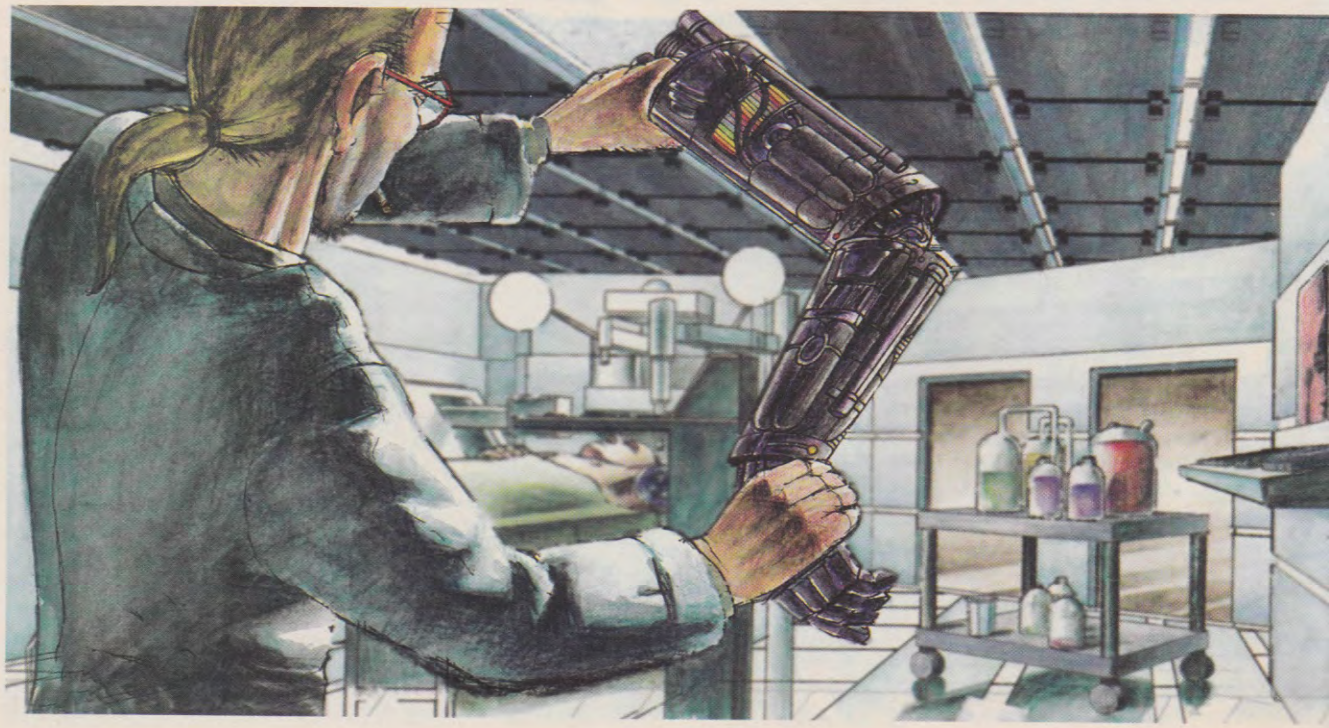
If you are asked to investigate a RackModulo customer, payment for your efforts is likely to be quite informal. It might be the cancellation of a favour the investigator owes, repayment in kind with goods or information, cash, or the acknowledgement that a favour is owed. Payment by either RackModulo Inc. or a RackModulo customer can be a rather more formal affair (if the work done is reasonably legal) or just as informal if the work done is of questionable probity or legality, or if anyone involved wants to be able to deny that they did it.

Discovering it Yourselves

RackModulo's facilities are very easily tailored to suit any given set of player interests. The possibilities of what may be going on inside a module are endless. Any kind of party can trace some enemy or rival back to a RackModulo module, and consequently feel it necessary to get inside. They could discover that this is the legitimate business address of a company they are currently investigating. Or, on the other hand, they might even discover that this is the secret headquarters, or secret research station where they can find out what is really going on.

A Patron at RackModulo

One of RackModulo's customers might well need the services of the party for any number of reasons. The party could visit the site and become reasonably familiar with it, being given various jobs and paid for them. This is a good way of making them realise how heavy the security is. Then the patrons could disappear without warning and the module locked, possibly still



owing money to the party. What has happened? Are they still inside? Will the PCs break in to find out, and what will they find if they do? A variant on this is the key to the module left waiting for the party at the frame office, but the security is not disabled, or a mutual enemy is waiting inside. Or the party could inherit a module from a patron, thinking this is a wonderful place to hole up until the first monthly bill arrives. "How much?!"

Renting from RackModulo

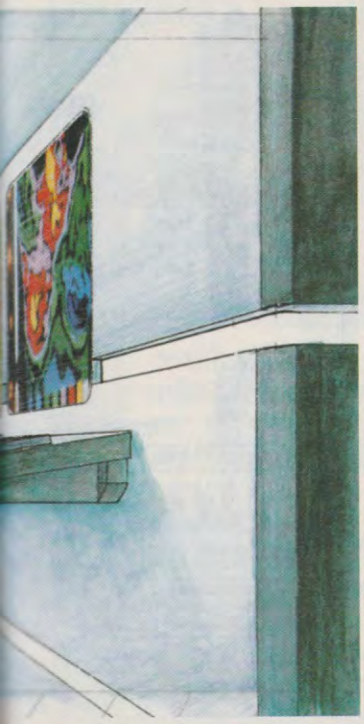
Wealthy parties may have reason to hire a module themselves. RackModulo deals with anyone who has a sufficient credit rating. This can be particularly good if a group is looking for somewhere to do something illegal. It can also entangle them with their neighbours in the nearby modules. This works well with a party which is somewhat shady but still has a fair degree of morality left. Someone could come to it with a series of truly horrific allegations about what is happening in the module next door. This might of course be the truth, or the informer might have their own agenda to fulfil. If you want to stop your party renting from RackModulo, all you have to do is make sure it is far too expensive.

Making a Mistake

Semi-legitimate outfits such as body-modification clinics operate in modules, and these can be identified only by their numbers. If a party decides to visit one of these outfits, but has been given the wrong number (either accidentally or on purpose), it could quite easily find itself next door and in serious trouble. This can be a very interesting way to set up a new adventure.

Interrupted

Any group which manages to get past all that security intact can feel extremely proud of itself – at least until the owners get home.



Module 8-6

Module 8-6, illustrated, is owned by the mysterious Dr Locke. The good doctor specialises in body modification, but rumours abound that he also does illegal transplants and strange experiments. These rumours are actually all true. By day, the place is a thriving clinic, at night Dr Locke performs his experiments. The surgery will be deserted at night, but Dr Locke always sleeps in his lab, and is used to meeting Zo-Zo most nights after midnight.

A party can become involved with Dr Locke in many ways. One of them may get a cyberpart from him which may later turn out to be identified as coming from a murder victim. Or they may discover the activities of the mysterious Zo. Or they may be hired to discover the whereabouts of the last person who tried to investigate him.

1: The airlock entrance to the module. Cycle time is about 15 seconds. With careful cramming, ten people can fit into the 5' by 5' space, but this only happens on exit, and the elevator only works if just one person is in it in any case. The inside controls allow the airlock to be cycled to vacuum.

2: This space is the airlock machinery.

3: The safe room, which can undergo complete air replacement in seconds, and which is equipped with a chemical spill emergency shower and various other first aid supplies. This is a very secure room, although the door can, however, be overridden from the outside with the proper codes, making the thick, tough walls less useful to a holdout.

4: This is the reception area. In the daytime this room contains a secretary, several computers, some chairs and customers waiting to undergo various procedures. At night it is completely deserted but for a camera. The security procedures can identify anyone entering through the airlock and have been ruthlessly set to gas anyone they do not instantly recognise, and set off an alarm in the laboratory. Anyone found gassed will then become one of Dr. Locke's experimental subjects. If people entering the area do not fall to the floor within just three minutes, yet more lethal measures are enabled. Dr Locke will not, however, call for outside security in anything but a personal emergency.

5: Physiotherapy chamber. This room contains both physical equipment and a whole body computer set up. It makes heavy use of virtual reality technology. Particularly nasty referees may wish to contemplate the results of a character getting stuck in something very much like a holodeck, which is insisting that the character learns to use a body part they do not actually possess.

6: Storage. This room is refrigerated because it is used for storing body parts, of both the flesh and cyber varieties, until they are needed. When required the parts are ordered by computer, placed in boxes and moved by robotic helpers.

7. The surgery. This room contains a surgical table with associated computer equipment, such as remote operated knives for example. There is also a console from which Dr Locke operates his equipment.

8. Lab. The laboratory contains all kinds of dangerous scientific experimental equipment. This generally includes a subject or two, who are usually kept caged and sometimes heavily drugged.

9. The recovery room. This is where patients get some rest after their op'.

Next month

We're off to find out what's been found at the dig...

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arcane issue 1 has now COMPLETELY sold out – there's no way you can grab a copy from us. Sorry.

Issue 3 had a complete, free RPG called *Skool Roolz*, reviewed *Cybergeneration* and *Warhammer Fantasy Battle CD-ROM*, had an article on making your characters more quirky and featured Mr Smith's Trans-dimensional Emporium as our Encounter.

Issue 4 explained roleplaying for beginners, discussed the role of acting in gaming, reviewed *MIddle Earth: The Wizards*, *Legend of the Five Rings* and *Night Below*, while Stormburg, the flying extra-planar city materialised in the Encounters section.

Issue 5 had Richard Garfield's thoughts on *Netrunner*, advice on wars, a feature on the roleplaying scene in Japan and reviewed *Vampire: The Dark Ages*, *Don't Look Back*, *Mage: The Ascension* and *Heresy*, as well as having The Train pull into the Encounters section.

Issue 6 explained why the Christian right want to ban roleplaying games, took a look at the strange worlds of Steampunk, and reviewed *Netrunner*, the best card game since *Magic*, *GURPS Goblins* and *Space Hulk 2nd Edition*. Oh, and we gave you your very own Keep by way of the Encounter.

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Issue 7 explored the worlds of terror with our cover feature on how to create the perfect horror scenario. It looked at how you can introduce time travel into your games, sent you to Prison with the month's Encounter, poked fun at the way roleplayers view their dice and reviewed the best RPG this year: *Conspiracy X*.

Issue 8 suggested many a way that you can introduce some mysticism back into the magic systems of your fantasy games. We also gave you the chance to try out 20 play-by-mail games for free, and we reviewed all the latest RPG and CCG releases (including *Pendragon 4th Edition*, Axis Mundi for *Werewolf*, and *Alliances*).

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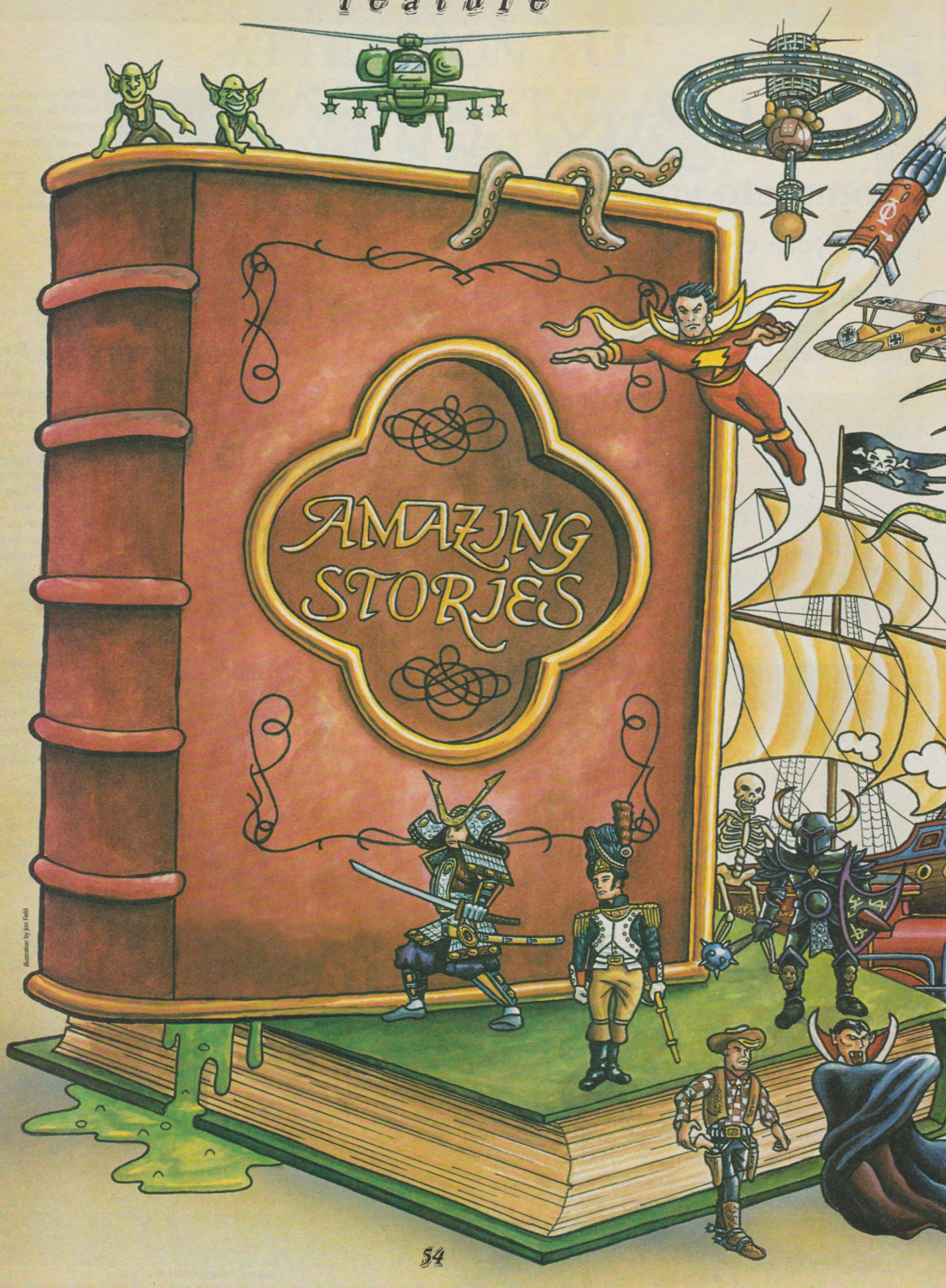


illustration by Jon Field

DO IT YOURSELF PART 4: SCULPTING LIFE WITH THE ROLL OF A DIE

In the final part of Lee Brimmicombe-Wood's overview of system design, he looks at character generation – the first step for any player who wants to play your system.

Let's face it, character generation is definitely one of the most fun parts of roleplaying. It's a gas! You start off with a blank character sheet and what comes out the other end of the creation process is anybody's guess. It's an exciting experience watching a set of rolls, values and ideas cohere into something that takes on a life of its own.

For most of us, the process of creating a character and fleshing it out is fairly easy. Roleplayers are a pretty creative bunch on the whole and they aren't short of ideas. However, for some players, getting the initial inspiration, idea or hook for a character can be a difficult hurdle. For these people, the character creation system is an essential tool. For other players, much of the fun of character generation comes in manipulating the creation rules to produce an interesting or idealised character. For these types, character creation can be an end in itself. For another sort of player altogether, the challenge is in taking a randomly rolled set of attribute values and creating an interesting role from that.

Of course the primary function of character generation is to create a set of abstract values and ratings, consistent with the game mechanics, which describe the character's abilities and personality, their quirks and peculiarities, their standing, their excellence and their worth. I like to think of these values as a framework upon which to hang a character. They provide an objective measure of the qualities specific to a character, and it's up to the player, in true Doctor Frankenstein style, to breathe life into the result.

For some game designers (myself included, I must confess) the character generation mechanics can be the hardest part of the game design. Because it impinges so much on factors such as gameplay and balance (you might not wish the characters in your game to be too powerful or too weak, for instance) it's a tough one to get right and requires careful attention.

One of the nice features of random character generation rules is that players and referees can always subvert the system, introducing house rules and dice conventions that give them more control over the process.

MIX 'N' MATCH

There are several approaches to character generation and you can pretty much mix 'n'

FREEFORM CHARACTER GENERATION

One approach to character generation is for a player and referee to simply agree by consensus what the values and abilities for a character are. There's nothing wrong with this unstructured approach and it works very well for mature groups of players because it's freeform and very flexible. However, for inexperienced players it works less well. Such players may be tempted to push the referee for as much as they can get and the ref may in turn feel forced to impose limits on the players – something which is unsatisfactory for all concerned. Another problem with this freeform approach is that gamers may be less tempted to give their players obvious disadvantages or weaknesses which could make their characters more interesting.

Weaknesses, Disadvantages and Advantages

Many players don't like their characters to be disadvantaged, psychologically or physically. Of course many others do, having realised that the most interesting characters are those who are flawed, or who have to triumph over adversity and so on. Some of this stuff can come from character play, of course, but not many players are willing to subject their characters to this kind of thing without some concrete incentive to do so. After all, why go through all the hassle of playing a cripple or a psychological basket case unless you get something worth having in return?

It's not a bad idea, then, to offer the players a trade-off, giving them extra skills, attributes, wealth or whatever, in return for accepting a disadvantage. The same principle, reversed, can equally apply to obvious advantages – taking something away from a player character who has a significant edge in some way over all the other characters in the game. Points-based games are designed for doing exactly this kind of trade-off, but there's no reasons why other systems can't do it too, offering players extra attribute levels or skills in return for certain disadvantages.

Testing the character creation system to destruction may be one of the toughest parts of the playtest. This is where you discover the ingenuity of players for manipulating the mechanics to create the most extreme, weird or downright silly characters you can imagine. If you find that a player can, say, create a starship engineer with almost no knowledge of electronics, then something is wrong with your system.

match them all. The most traditional method is the random roll, where some or all of a character's values are rolled for on dice. The appeal of this is manyfold. It absolves the designer from having to create a 'balanced' character creation system, and it can throw up some genuinely interesting and challenging results.

Games Workshop's excellent *Golden Heroes* superhero system used the random approach to generate a clutch of superpowers from a list. However, what was most interesting about this game was that it encouraged players to take their random powers and come up with coherent rationale for the character. It encouraged players to let their imaginations run away with them.

The most obvious problem with random systems is that, particularly if there are a lot of variables in the generation process, they can frequently throw out completely inappropriate characters for your game. Now, before anyone writes in, I know plenty of people who enjoy the challenge of making such characters work, but there are a lot of others who hate it. Completely. Many's the character generation session I've sat through where some players have whined incessantly about bad dice and have continually asked for re-rolls. Another quirk of random systems is their tendency to create unbalanced groups of characters, with some much more powerful or capable than others. Of course, for some referees and players this is no bad thing at all.

One of the most popular alternatives to random generation is the points-based system, *GURPS* and *Champions* being possibly the best examples of these. Points-based character generation gives each player a limited budget of points to spend on their character's attributes, skills and special abilities, and allows them to trade off disadvantages to gain extra points. The strength of these systems is that they allow the player to more or less design the character they want. Also, in a player group, the characters should be fairly balanced (or at least if they are not balanced, that's the player's own responsibility). Everyone starts off on equal points.

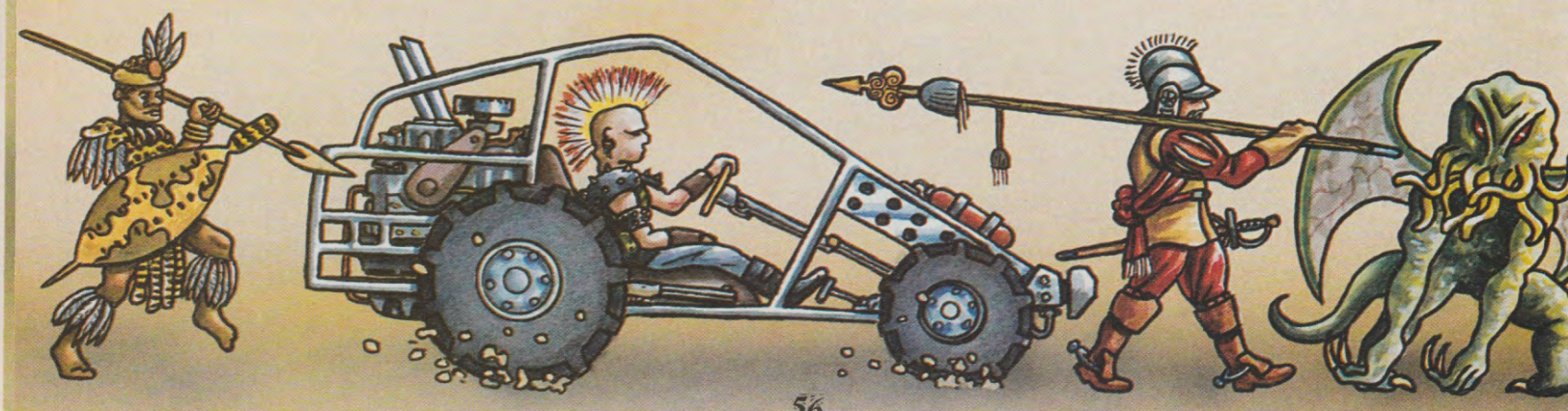
"You start off with a blank character sheet and what comes out the other end of the creation process is anybody's guess."

Character Traits

There's been a trend over the years, particularly in societal games such as *Pendragon,* to systematize aspects of the character play. In part, this is a holdover from the *D&D* days of character alignments and the like, which encouraged players to be chaotic or lawful or whatever. But systems are much more subtle about this nowadays. In *Pendragon,* players have a whole slew of rules to encourage particular codes of behaviour, while in games such as *GURPS* and *Champions,* players may accept various psychological limitations or character flaws in return for bonus points, on condition that they roleplay them. Because this kind of feature usually limits the behaviour of a character in some way, it generally appears only in games where players have the option to choose them and/or have an obvious incentive. Imposing traits on a group's characters is a sure-fire way to annoy your players.

Not for the Uninitiated

The disadvantage of a points game is that it doesn't help those players who are unsure of the kind of character they want. These systems rely on players knowing what the end result should look like before they even begin spending any points, and don't give any easy hooks to inspire them. Another glitch with the points game is its inaccessibility to novices. Certainly *Champions,* with its involved number crunching during character generation, would be a nightmare game to introduce to a roleplaying newbie.



The other main problem for the designer is that these systems are a pain to balance properly. Because points games encourage a certain kind of player to optimise their characters, they are susceptible to manipulation. For instance, if a particular minor disadvantage offers a big points bonus to the player, the designer might find that option being taken up more often than he expected. A quick look at *GURPS* and *Champions* shows that they both took many years of trial and error, and several editions, before they reached the more or less balanced state they are in now.

An honourable mention in the points game department should go to the diceless *Amber* RPG, in which a character's capabilities are measured on the relative number of points the player puts into his attributes. Here, players bid their points during character generation to become top dog of a particular attribute. The final bids create a kind of ladder, which establishes a hierarchy of how good the characters are, in ascending order. Confused? Well, if you take a quick look at the game you'll soon see what I mean.

Ready to go

Another way of generating characters for players is to template them. *Star Wars* and *Shadowrun* took this kind of approach, creating a dozen or more different classes of character, all made up and ready to go. All the player had to do was give them a name and a small amount of history, and they could start playing straight away. In some ways, this approach is great for getting novice gamers off the ground quickly, and it saves on long and tedious character generation sessions with players who are not completely sure exactly what this roleplaying lark is all about.

On the other hand, templating makes characters more uniform, less quirky and less individualistic than they might otherwise be. Despite the advantages for beginners, at the end of the day, there is only so much fun you can have with a character that has essentially been created by someone else.

Passport to your campaign

The end result of all this character generation – whichever method you eventually decide to use – should be a coherent framework of values, ratings and numbers on which the player builds their character. The finished article, the character, is then the passport to your system and to your campaign.

It should always be remembered that character generation is designed to create characters which are different and distinct from each other. If your system tends to create characters who are essentially similar and differ only in detail, then it's not doing its job.

This series of articles about designing your own system has to end here. It has only skimmed the surface of the subject matter, and the intention was to lay out some of the general principles involved rather than deal with a lot of the specifics. However, if you want examples of design, there's probably more than enough games already on your shelf which can give you pointers or interesting ideas to filch.

"The result of all this character generation should be a coherent framework of values."

My best advice is to simply get out there and do it. Create your own systems, your own games, your own worlds and you'll never have to shell out for another piece of product again.

If you're modelling your favourite TV show or book, a good exercise to perform is to try to create the lead character(s) using your character gen system. If you can do it, fine. If not, then you have to ask why.

Next month

Onwards! We say, for though this is the last in the series on how to write your own roleplaying game we've got another series lined up to kick off as of next month. Why, we ask, are all fantasy games set in the same fantasy land (well, almost)? They shouldn't be, as Phil Masters purports, and so he's going to supply you with a whole host of alternative 'eras' within which to set your fantasy campaigns. From the European Stone Age to the oriental Far East, our next series is going to take you on a fantastic trip through history that you won't forget!

Social Context

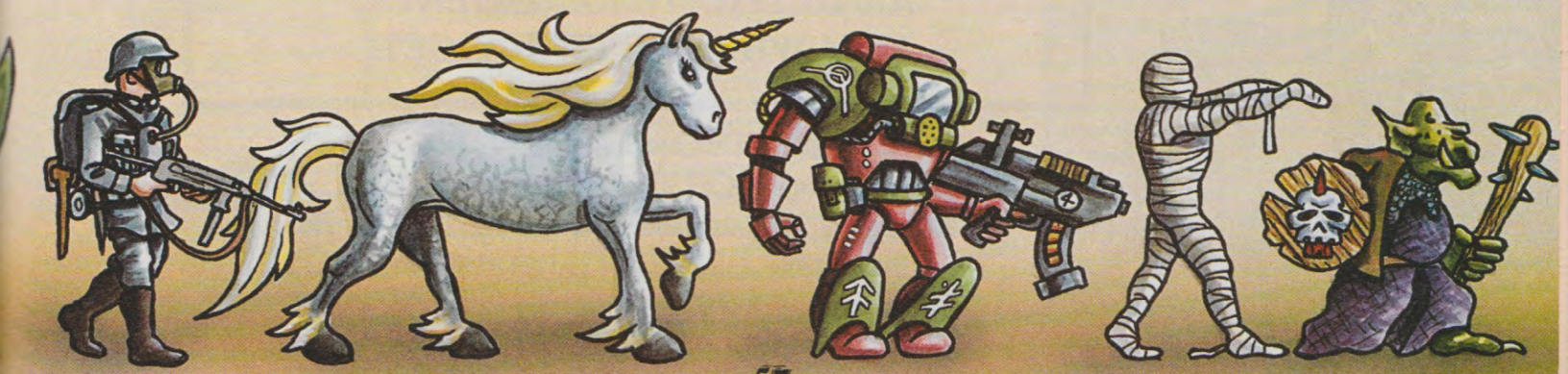
Most campaign environments place the character in a context in which social class, profession, wealth, social standing and repute are important, and it is possible to create rules and mechanisms for these societal factors that help drive the game.

For instance, if a player has to have a level five social class or +4 repute to get the ear of the King, then the player is encouraged to improve his or her level of standing.

Rules for modelling these cultural indicators have to be tailored to the campaign. In a contemporary game, profession and wealth may be the only social indicators required and have no more effect than determining the character's starting skills, cash or access to specialist equipment. For a medieval game, social class and reputation are more important; these factors may give the player die roll bonuses to their attempts to influence NPCs, or determine how much responsibility they are given.

Unlike the mechanics for combat or physical actions, the effects of societal factors are less well defined and more subject to referee interpretation. However, they may function in similar ways. Two opposing characters trying to persuade a crowd to their side could be handled as a conflict between their relative social standings or reputations. An attempt to bluff could be handled as a straight roll against a character's reputation.

Societal factors have an impact on the development of a character during the generation process; after all, a level zero serf probably wouldn't have any sword skills while a noble wouldn't know much about pick-pocketing. Guidelines could prevent these inconsistencies appearing.



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The Month In Games

What a lot we've got...

YET AGAIN WE'VE BEEN deluged with new releases for review, most notably the *2nd Edition* of *Wraith: The Oblivion* from White Wolf. In our opinion this is one of the strongest roleplaying games you can currently buy – and that's why it got this month's **arcane** Seal of Approval. Also worth a look (if not a long-term play) is *Dragon Storm*, the first CCG which is also an RPG. It'll be very interesting to see to what extent this idea catches on over the coming months – perhaps it could finally bridge the gap between these two forms of gaming.

Our policy is to review honestly, fairly and incisively all of the major roleplaying, CCG and related game releases. If it's praised in **arcane** you know you can buy it with confidence.

All our reviews are by experienced gamers and independent, professional journalists; people who play the games that you do. This definitely is *the* place for definitive reviews of games and expansions.

A lot of the stuff reviewed in **arcane** is imported from the USA by various distributors, so the prices we give are guidelines only.

Pick of the month

Wraith: The Oblivion
Page 60

"Some of the most intense roleplay experiences"

Dragon Storm
Page 66

"Combat proves to be both fast and deadly"

The Icons

Each review in **arcane** is identified with a rather nifty icon showing what kind of game it is. Here's what they mean:

Roleplaying systems

Collectable card games and expansions

Board games, miniature systems

Dice games and expansions

Computer games and utilities

Books and supplements

The Scores

Everything reviewed in **arcane** gets a mark out of 10. Here's a guide to what the individual marks represent...

Score 10/10 Perfect. There's simply nothing better.
Score 9/10 Excellent, a classic. Highly recommended.
Score 8/10 Very good, with few problems. Recommended.
Score 7/10 Good, but not exceptional.
Score 6/10 Above average, but not without problems.
Score 5/10 Average, or a mixture of good and bad.
Score 4/10 Below average, but not without merit.
Score 3/10 Poor, crucially flawed in some way.
Score 2/10 Very poor, should be avoided.
Score 1/10 Appallingly bad, no redeeming features at all.

arcane seal of approval

Each month we fight and argue among ourselves to select that one extra-special product most deserving of your money and the coveted **arcane** accolade.

The index

Everything in this month's massive reviews section...

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60 **Wraith: The Oblivion 2nd Ed**

Wraith: The Obli

A roleplaying game | £16.99 | Out in August

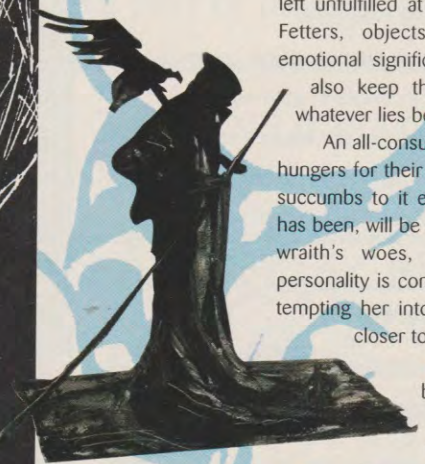
White Wolf | 001 404 292 1819

How many roleplaying games do you know that start with the death of the characters? And things get worse...

Horror in roleplaying is nothing new. *Call of Cthulhu* has been doing it stylishly for over a decade now. But even at its best (or worst?), *Cthulhu* rarely plumbs the depths of fear, even terror, that *Wraith: The Oblivion* can. *Wraith* is the fourth in White Wolf's Storyteller system games set in the World of Darkness. It is also, without a shadow of doubt, the most difficult of the collection to play well.

The main rules deal almost exclusively with the underworld of the Western world – Stygia, or the Dark Kingdom of Iron. Information on the underworlds of other societies can be found in the *Players' Guide*, and in the two strong, but growing, range of *Dark Kingdom* supplements.

The game casts the players as the restless spirits of the newly dead, trapped in a dark, decaying reflection of the real world called the Shadowlands. They can see and hear the world of the living, but can barely interact with it. They are still intimately linked to it through driving passions, which they left unfulfilled at the time of their deaths. Fetters, objects and people of great emotional significance to them during life also keep them from moving on to whatever lies beyond.



An all-consuming force called Oblivion hungers for their very souls, and if a wraith succumbs to it everything he is, and ever has been, will be destroyed. Just to add to a wraith's woes, the dark side of her personality is constantly whispering to her, tempting her into acts that draw her ever closer to Oblivion.

This afterlife is ruled by the authoritarian forces of the Hierarchy, whose members count their power by the number of souls they control. The Hierarchy also regularly takes wraiths and turns their (possibly still sentient) forms into any number of useful objects from swords to furniture to paving stones.

Meanwhile, Renegades lurk outside the areas the Hierarchy controls, fighting for a wide variety of causes. Heretics attempt to convert others to their particular belief of how to escape, or Transcend, from this terrible existence. Working against them all are spectres – wraiths who have all but

ion 2nd Edition

succumbed to Oblivion and seek to drag as many others as possible down with them.

Why, you may well ask, would anyone want to play such a game? Well, for pretty much the same reasons that you go to see a horror movie or a psychological thriller – it offers you a chance to experience these emotions in a safe environment. But if the game is to really generate the right atmosphere and emotions, the system needs to be as good as the ideas.

Wraith is presented in the by now traditional White Wolf style of three sections each consisting of three chapters. The first section gives a basic introduction, an involved look at the setting and the basic rules, common to all the Storyteller games. The second looks at character creation, character traits and the Shadow, the dark half of each character. And the last contains storytelling guidelines and ideas along with the main body of the rules, including the combat system.

Characters are defined by nine attributes and various abilities, usually rated from one to five dots. Most actions are resolved by rolling a number of ten-sided dice equal to the sum of a relevant trait and ability, against a difficulty number. All dice that come up over that number are considered successes. This is a simple, fast and fairly elegant system which allows differing degrees of both success and failure.

Wraiths also possess Arcanoi, natural talents not dissimilar to magic, which give them some ability to affect the living world as well as control over their own bodies or corpus. Both the Arcanoi and the corpus are powered through Pathos, energy the wraith garners through being in proximity to a mortal experiencing one of the emotions that drives the wraith's passions. The passions are also rated from one to five. It is this part of the system that is at the core of the game. To keep their wraith in existence, players have to experience the emotions that drive them, and find ways to interact with the living and survive the horror of their afterlife.

"*Wraith* is capable of creating some of the most intense roleplay experiences that you are ever likely to have."

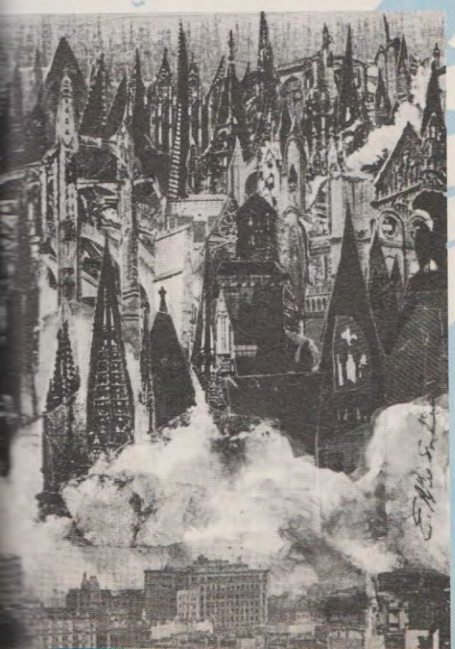
The most unusual twist in the game is the wraith's Shadow. A separate entity, complete with its own character sheet, it is played by another player alongside his main character. The Shadowguide, as the player is called, can offer the main character advice, abuse and extra dice on his rolls. But just as the wraith collects Pathos, the Shadow can gain Angst from fulfilling its dark passions – twisted versions of the wraith's own ones. And if the Shadow gets too much power, the wraith truly goes over to the dark side. As well as adding a further disturbing element into the game, Shadowguiding allows players whose main characters are not being focused on at a particular time to stay actively involved in the game.

These aspects of the system work intelligently to further the dark, brooding atmosphere of the game. But generating these emotions is not without its dangers. The background of the game is truly horrific, the prospects for most characters bleak, and the intense nature of the relationship between player and shadow open to abuse. Both storyteller and players have to work hard to prevent the game slipping into a depressing experience – after all, games are meant to be fun. Keeping elements of hope and humour is always going to be hard work, and can only really be achieved by experienced gamers.

There are other problems, too. The storyteller combat system, now on its tenth outing, is still a little confused. The way the background is set up, while great on showing the broad sweep of the history of the dead, leaves the storyteller with a lot of work to do to design a setting for the game, while also trying to introduce the players to all the concepts involved.

But it is definitely worth the effort. *Wraith: The Oblivion* is one of the most mature and involving roleplaying games ever published. It is capable of creating some of the most intense roleplay experiences that you are ever likely to have. The question is whether you want to experience the passions, fears, terrors and occasional beauty that the game evokes. For many, the answer is no. For the rest, a truly great time lies in store.

Adam Tinworth



Only a few character types from other White Wolf games can easily communicate with wraiths. Giovanni vampires, Euthanatos and Dreamspeaker mages, and Sluagh changelings are the most obvious examples, which allow for some interesting possibilities.

And the players said...

CHRIS: "One of the most atmospheric games I have ever played – bittersweet with very little sweet. Not for gung-ho roleplayers."

KATH: "It definitely sucks you in, but I don't think I could play it more than once a month."

MARTYN: "It's got a really good feel to it, but it can be a little too real."

THERESE: "Depressing and mysterious. It makes you think of life as a better option."

Score 9/10

Dead again?

So, what's in the new hardback edition that should have you rushing to buy it, even if you have the first edition?

Well, there's only really one major rules revision. Instead of having their body measured by corpus alone, wraiths now have temporary and permanent corpus. The temporary corpus will, of course, go up and down through the course of the wraith's life... sorry, existence in the Shadowlands. Permanent corpus, however, marks the maximum the temporary ever reaches. This is to make destruction harrowings less of an immediate threat, but to give them a frightening cumulative effect. A wraith who fails a harrowing loses a point of permanent corpus. That makes it more likely he will lose all his temporary corpus at some point, drop into a harrowing, lose a point of permanent corpus and the like. An almost inescapable spiral into Oblivion is created.

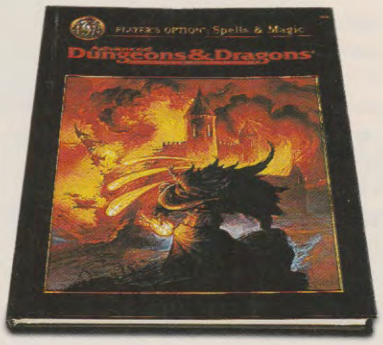
The rewriting makes the book clearer. Inconsistencies are ironed out, ideas better explained, Transcendence further explored and the like. Many of the ideas introduced in supplements from the *Players' Guide* to *The Risen* have also found a home here.

Player's Option

A supplement for *AD&D* **£12.99** **TSR** **01223 212517**

The mystic arts get the player's option treatment...

Out now



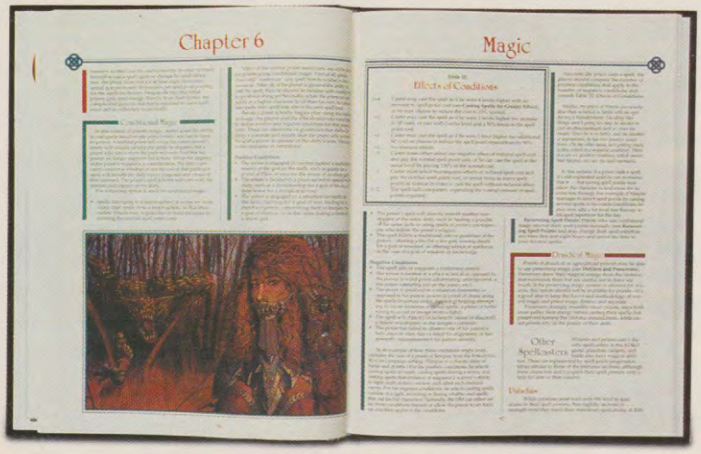
Magic has always lain at the heart of the *D&D* games. It was the inclusion of magic and magical creatures that made *Chainmail, D&D's* precursor, stand out from other skirmish wargames and led (in part) to roleplaying being created.

With the *Player's Option* series, TSR has been able to revisit central parts of the *AD&D* game and offer expanded rules and optional systems for dealing with them.

New specialist character classes include the Dimensionalist, a Wizard who studies magic which manipulates time, space and dimension, and the Crusader – a Priest who's even more effective at fighting than a normal Cleric, but has fewer spheres of access.

"The rules... allow for arms to be disintegrated, rib cages to be crushed and a range of other gruesome effects."

Having already dealt with the two other crucial aspects of *AD&D* in the previous *Player's Option* rulebooks – fighting in *Combat & Tactics,* and characters in *Skills & Powers* – the third and final book in the series takes an in-depth look at magic.



Spells & Magic contains 192 pages, split into an intro, eight chapters and four appendices. As well as offering advice on integrating *Spells & Magic* into an existing campaign, the introduction also takes a look at magic in *AD&D,* discussing such factors as its power, scarcity and use in storytelling. After that, the book plunges into the specifics of the new rules and optional systems.

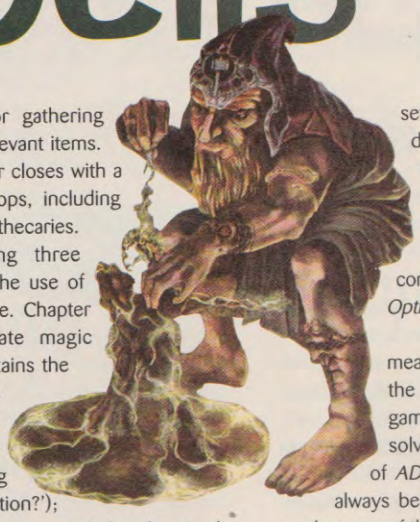
The first two chapters deal with Wizards and Priests respectively, and follow a similar format. The various schools (for Wizards) and spheres of access (for Priests) are discussed first, with some minor changes made to the spell lists. Specialist classes are next, complete with some new ones to choose from. Both chapters close with an expanded version of the customised character class rules from the second *Player's Option* book, *Skills & Powers* (reviewed in **arcane** 2). These are fully compatible with the *Skills & Powers* book, but offer more choices and options for budding magic users.

The third chapter takes a look at the other spell-casting character classes in *AD&D,* including Bards, Rangers and Paladins, complete with optional abilities and limitations. It then goes on to consider multi-classed characters and magic-using monsters.

Chapter four covers proficiencies, comparing the standard 'slot' system and the character point rules introduced by *Skills & Powers.* It then goes on to list a range of new Wizard and Priest proficiencies, introducing the concept of 'signature spells' – an idea similar to weapons specialisation which allows Wizard characters to improve their abilities with a particular spell, gaining bonuses when casting it.

Following this, the fifth chapter examines the equipment needed by magic users, and offers rules for Wizards' laboratories, Priests' altars, discusses the pros and cons of using spell components in the game, and in addition

Spells & Magic



presents rules for gathering and buying the relevant items. Finally, the chapter closes with a look at magic shops, including Arcanists and Apothecaries.

The following three chapters look at the use of magic in the game. Chapter six offers alternate magic systems, and contains the most ambitious and far-reaching options in the book (see 'Pointing in the right direction?'); chapter seven offers expanded and revised rules for researching new spells and creating new magical items, including discussions of how these processes can affect a campaign and suggestions for maintaining game balance. And the last chapter offers new rules for spell-casting in combat, including rules for noticing spell-casting and collateral damage from various spell effects (fire, cold, lightning, acid, wind and so on). It concludes with a discussion of critical strikes for damage-dealing spells. The rules are compatible with the first *Player's Option* book, *Combat & Tactics,* and include a range of new tables for spells that allow for arms to be disintegrated, rib cages to be crushed and a range of other gruesome effects.

The first two appendices are made up of the obligatory new spells. It seems that TSR still finds it impossible to release an *AD&D* supplement that concerns magic without throwing in at least 50 of these, nevertheless, some of those on offer are interesting (if somewhat potent). Finally, the last two appendices offer revised lists of Wizard spells by school and Priest spells by Sphere. Although most of the changes are fairly minor, they do go a long way towards making sense of these confusing aspects of the game.

As the last book in the *Player's Options* series, *Spells & Magic* achieves what it sets out to do. It's the most in-depth look at every aspect of magic in *AD&D* so far, offers a host of optional and expanded rules for dealing with it in the game, and complements the other *Player's Option* books perfectly.

However, by offering a means for referees to customise the way magic works in the game, it also goes some way to solving the inherent limitations of *AD&D*. The magic system has always been cited as one of the key weaknesses of the rules by detractors, and it has to be said that they have a point. The basic system models one particular style of magic (heavily inspired by Jack Vance's *Dying Earth* books), and this lack of flexibility has often been the cause of headaches for referees and players alike. The spell point system, though not perfect, does offer alternatives to the standard 'memorise and spell, and then forget it when you cast it' system, and is a welcome addition.

Player's Option: Spells & Magic is not without a couple of problems, though, both of which are related to the other books in the series. Firstly, although you don't actually *need* the other books, they're certainly very helpful and some sections of *Spells & Magic* are of little use without them. On a more general note, *Spells & Magic* shares the same downside as the entire series – by using the *Player's Option* books it's possible to completely customise your *AD&D* game, and overcome many of the limitations of the basic rules. However, doing so adds significantly to the complexity of the game, and you can't help thinking that in many cases it might be easier to simply use a different rules system in the first place.

Still, there's no denying that both on its own and as the final part of the series, *Spells & Magic* is an interesting and useful book for any *AD&D* referee.

Andy Butcher

Our favourite new spell from *Spells & Magic* has to be Heart of Stone, a Necromancy spell that enables the caster to replace his living heart with a specially enchanted stone. While the spell lasts the Wizard becomes hard to hurt, but destroying his living heart (which is removed from the body) will kill him – just the thing for an arch-enemy of the players...

Score 7/10

Pointing in the right direction?

The most important new rules offered by *Spells & Magic* are contained in the sixth chapter, which introduces the concept of spell points. Under this system, instead of being able to memorise a fixed number of spells of each level, as in the standard *AD&D* rules, magic-using characters gain a number of spell points, dependent on their level and other considerations (Priests, for example, gain bonus spell points for high Wisdom scores). These points are then used to 'pay' for the memorising spells, the cost depending on the spell's level.

On their own, spell points enable characters more freedom and flexibility in their choice of spells. However, the rest of the chapter offers a number of ways in which the system can be used to modify the way magic works in the game. These vary from minor changes to entirely different magic systems.

At the lower end of the scale, by paying twice the spell point cost of a given level a player can choose which spell of that level to use at the time of casting – this allows characters to 'memorise' fewer spells but gain more freedom and flexibility. On the other hand, the rules for 'Channellers' offer a magic system whereby casting spells is physically draining for the magician, and may even result in injury or death – a popular style of magic in many fantasy novels, and one which completely alters the way magic works in the game.

There are several different systems detailed, and even if none of the ones presented exactly matches your image of how magic should work, the examples should make it relatively easy for you to come up with your own system. Although the spell points rules still have their limitations, they do open the *AD&D* game up to a variety of new styles of magic, and are therefore the most impressive aspect of *Spells & Magic*.

Dragon Storm

A roleplaying game | 70-card start deck £8.95 | 15-card booster pack £2.50

Black Dragon Press | 001 810 232 5870 | Out now

can cards and roleplaying really mix?

Just for a change, orcs in *Dragon Storm* aren't actually the bad guys – sure, they tend to be bandits and thieves, but they're also enemies of the evil Necromancers.

Ever since *Magic: The Gathering* was released and became an overnight success, some people have been predicting that collectable card games would spell the end of roleplaying. Obviously, they've been wrong so far. In fact, because they are often stocked in the same stores as roleplaying games and are often manufactured by the same companies, CCGs have certainly served as an introduction to roleplaying for some people. *Dragon Storm* is an attempt to take this one stage further – it's a roleplaying game based entirely on the use of collectable cards, as opposed to the more traditional pencil, paper and hefty rulebook.

Fire Fingers
WIZARD Ace, Spell 0 / F
Independent card. Play to inflict 1D6 HP magical damage to one target.
"At the right time, in the right place, a little fire goes a long way."
Book of Wizards' Wisdom
Temple Channel Stone
ITEM Magic

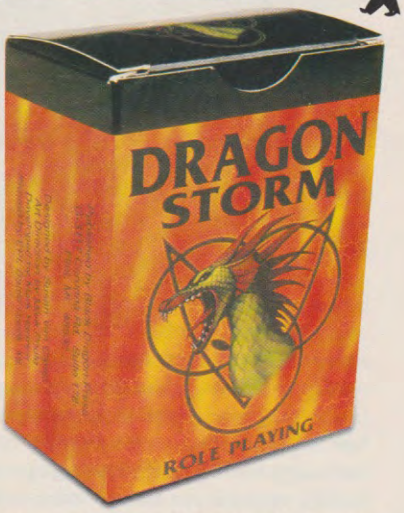
"It's a quick and easy system which requires a minimum of set-up time, and could prove to be a lot of fun."

Dragon Storm is a fantasy game, set in an area known as the Stormlands. The land gains its name from Dragon Storms, wild tempests of magical energy which appear seemingly from nowhere, destroying and warping everything in their path. Sometimes, however, young adults caught in a storm are not killed but subtly altered, emerging as shape shifters. Elves gain the ability to change into unicorns, dwarves into gargoyles and humans into dragons or wolves. Unfortunately for newly emerged shape shifters, the majority of the population fear these magical beings, and the necromancers that rule much of the Stormlands hunt them down mercilessly. Unable to return to their old lives, the shape shifters live as exiles and rejected outcasts, always hiding from the necromancers and their minions.

In *Dragon Storm* the players take on the roles of recently changed shape shifters who have banded together for protection, or an orc. As the game progresses, they will slowly discover the source of their powers, not to mention the terrible truth behind the rule of the necromancers.

Each *Dragon Storm* starter deck contains enough cards for one starting character and two sheets of rules – one for the player, the other for the referee. The cards themselves are split into two main categories – Player cards with orange backs, and Gamemaster cards with blue backs – and then subdivided into a number of different types.

For players these are Ace, Anchor, Boon, Character and Item. Ace cards represent special abilities and powers with a limited number of uses, such as spells, the ability to change into another form and so on. Anchor cards represent permanent abilities, such as being able to cast Wizard spells. There are also two special types of Anchor – backgrounds and flaws. Boons are special rewards which a character can only ever earn through play.



Character cards are the basis for a new, erm, character defining their race (Human Dragon or Elven Unicorn, for example), starting characteristics and any special notes. Item cards represent pieces of equipment, weapons, armour and various other objects.

Player cards are further subdivided into a number of categories – Channel, Dragon, Gargoyle, Human, Item, Orc, Shaman, Unicorn, Universal, Valarian, Werewolf, Witch and Wizard. These categories are used to define which cards a character can use – only a Human Dragon character can use Dragon Aces or Anchors, for example. Take a look at the 'Killer combos?' boxout opposite for an example of character generation.

Gamemaster cards are, obviously enough, designed for the referee, and are split into four main types – Cast cards are creatures and characters which are controlled by the

And the players said...

PAUL: "Successfully bridges the divide between RPGs and CCGs, but at a steep cost."

STEVE: "I really liked it – there are some ideas here that could well start turning up in other games."

EM: "A fun little game that could well introduce more people to the hobby, but will only be a passing phase itself."

referee, Feature cards are special powers and abilities which can be used by Cast cards, Terrain cards represent areas of the Stormlands, and last but not least Scene cards act as adventure hooks, offering possible encounters, events and so on.

Dragon Storm is an interesting attempt to combine elements of CCGs with more traditional roleplaying. For a start the background and setting, while simple, offer a logical reason for the characters to be acting as a group and great potential for adventure.

Likewise, the rules are very simple and easy to pick up, with nearly all tasks being resolved by the roll of two six-sided dice, often modified by relevant characteristics and Ace cards. The player and the referee both roll, and if the player's modified result is higher, the character succeeds. Combat is adjudicated in a similar manner, and proves to be both fast and deadly. The entire game is explained in the equivalent of a mere eight sides of A4, including the background, the rules, several examples, an explanation of what roleplaying is and some good advice for new referees, which is an impressive feat in itself.

Although the basic framework for designing adventures suggested by the rules (which involves laying out face-down Terrain cards to form a map and creating a number of 'encounter stacks' of Cast, Feature and Scene cards which will confront the players) is vaguely reminiscent of a dungeon trek, it is at least easy to understand and requires a lot less time and effort from a new referee than most traditional RPGs. The rules also make it fairly clear that this is just a starting point, and as the referee gains more experience he or she should start to use the cards more as inspiration for stories than as 'playing pieces' to throw at the players.

The best thing about *Dragon Storm*, though, are the cards. Despite the somewhat tacky packaging these are of a high quality. Most of the artwork varies between good and excellent, the design is clear and easy to follow, and the cards as a whole really help to bring across the atmosphere of the game. They're also heavily laminated, and seem to stand up to frequent use pretty well.

As an introduction to roleplaying, *Dragon Storm* has a great deal of potential for both players and referees, especially those with prior experience of one or more CCGs. It's a quick and easy system which requires a minimum of set-up time, and could prove to be a lot of fun. Unfortunately, its longevity is questionable, and there is one big problem: even to begin a game, every player needs at least a single starter deck (and to have a choice of characters, more will be required). At nine quid each, this quickly starts to add up. Matters would only get worse as a campaign developed, because new cards would be in constant demand by both the referee and the players. Compared with the more traditional pen and paper systems with which it's competing, then, *Dragon Storm* could prove to be very expensive indeed.

Andy Butcher

Rock Fist
3
GARGOYLE Ace 0 / F
Use when in gargoyle form. Play to add +3 STR to a melee attack.
"Beware the gargoyle with hands of stone, whose blows fall like an avalanche."
Anonymous
Elethay Temple Ruins
SCENE
An old stone wall stands half-destroyed, all th left of a temple ruined by necromancers or i spawn. At the gamemaster's discretion, Elet worshippers may add +2 to non-combat rolls m in the ruined temple.
POSSIBLE SCENES
•The temple retains its old magics. Relics, such the temple channel stone, could be found.
•Peasants, vermines or others have taken refuge i this holy place. They may be Elethay worshippers
•Warpspawn or others are desecrating the ruins.
Acid Spitter
6
FEATURE Warp 1 / P
User may spit acid as a 100 range attack. Natural DEF does not protect against acid. Armor permanently loses 1 point of DEF for each point of acid damage it blocks. An acid spitter has a range of 30 feet.
Acid Spitter

To be honest, the background to *Dragon Storm* is potentially one of the game's greatest strengths – if you're thinking of starting a new fantasy campaign, it might even be worth picking up a couple of decks just for inspiration...

Score 6/10

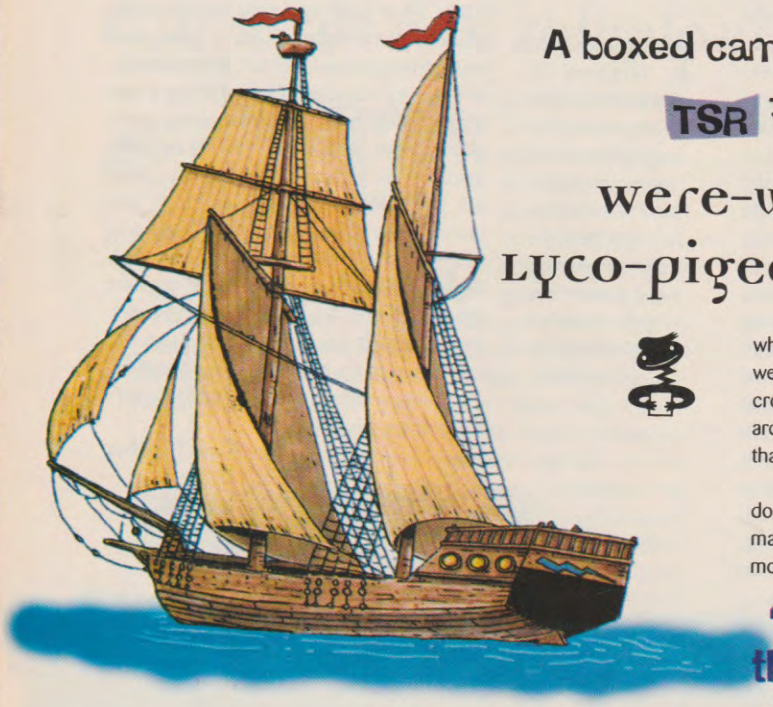
Killer combos?

Dragon Self Healing 1
Dispel Magic 2
Dragon's Eye 3
Lightning Bolt 7
Dragon Form 1
STR +6 COR 0 DEF +4 SPD 0 WIS 0 HP 0 CAP +3
DRAGON Ace 1 / V
Play to shape shift a dragon character into dragon form. Shifted dragons may not use weapons, armor or humanoid languages. A young dragon has short wings. It cannot fly unless a Dragon Flight card is used. A character may only play one form card at a time.
Dragon Form
Human Dragon +12
STR 0 COR 1 DEF 3 SPD 1 WIS 1 HP 26 CAP 7
DRAGON Character
This character may use human, dragon, item and universal cards, and may change into dragon by playing form cards.
Taint DEF: 6 Od, 3 Warp
Human Dragon
Weakling +6
STR -2 COR 0 DEF 0 SPD 0 WIS 0 HP 0 CAP 0
UNIVERSAL Anchor, Flaw 0 / P
A weakling character suffers a -2 penalty to all STR rolls, including melee attacks. A weakling may not use the Nightfighter Background card. The gamemaster may add more card use restrictions to a weakling character.
Weakling
Remorseful Apprentice 4
UNIVERSAL Anchor, Background 0 / P
While apprenticed to a necromancer, this character discovered he was a shape-shifter. Luckily the master did not see him change, so he was able to escape before he was exposed.
This character may use wizard cards, and can read and write Gomish. He can sense if a terrain area is warped, wasted, pristine or normal.
"A wise sage, I was eager to learn my first shifter. Now I can hardly bear to think about those days. We old masters tolerate and kill people like me."
An unnamed former apprentice
Remorseful Apprentice
Torch 1 gp STR
30' Rope 5 gp
Vale of Refreshment 25 gp
Tunic 2 gp
Waterskin 2 gp
STR 0 COR 0 DEF 0 SPD 0 WIS 0 HP 0 CAP -1/2
ITEM
A waterskin holds 5 rations of water without increasing its CAP.
"You can't carry water in a sack."
Mighty Mongo
Waterskin

Here's an example of a beginning character. The Character card itself lists beginning statistics, and gives a number of points to spend on other cards (12 in this case). By choosing the Flaw card, the character gains another six points. The Background card in this case allows the character to use Wizard spells, which are a type of Ace card – these are also bought with points and are stacked to the left of the character, ready for use in the game (each Ace can be used once, then the character must rest to regain them). As well as two wizard spells, the character has chosen three Aces that are unique to Human Dragon characters. On the right are the character's equipment cards, which don't cost points but money.

The North:

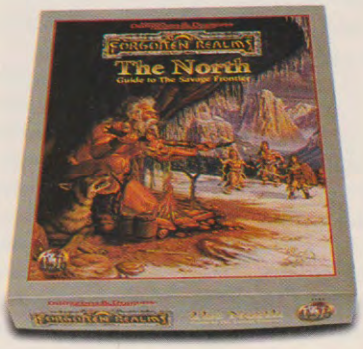
Guide to the Savage Frontier



A boxed campaign set for *AD&D*

£15.99 **Out now**

TSR 01223 212517



were-whippets and lyco-pigeons, anyone?

The introduction to this expansion pack claims that, "when the average person thinks of the North, they think of a rugged land of jagged, snow-capped peaks, endless alpine forests, lawlessness and monsters with rich mines scattered around a lot of untamed wilderness." It then proceeds, in a far more long-winded fashion, to describe the North as a rugged land of jagged, snow-capped peaks, endless alpine forests, lawlessness and monsters with rich mines scattered around a lot of untamed wilderness. Only a little bit more spread out and with some people in it.

To tell the truth, though, that's what you want from a Northern expansion kit. If the North turned out to be filled with sun-drenched beaches and highly civilised folk who went around being nice to each other, we'd all be a bit disappointed. What the crowd wants is berserk barbarians and arcane magicians battling orc hordes – and that's just what the crowd gets.

The North achieves what it sets out to do – fill out the top of the *Forgotten Realms* maps with cities, peoples, legends, monsters and treasure. Split into two huge maps and three books – which detail the Wilderness, Cities and take an in-depth look at the city of Daggerford – it offers fair, if not brilliant, value for £16.

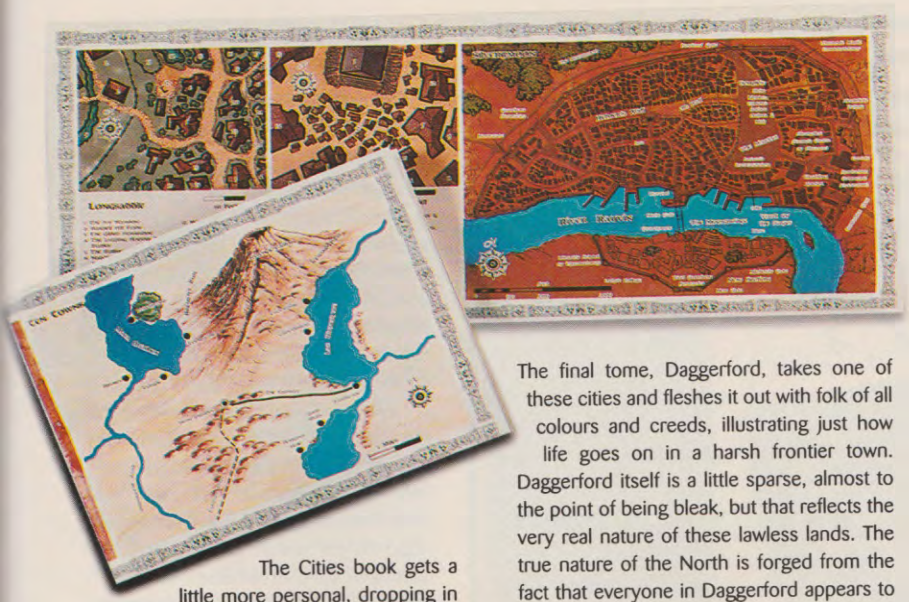
"While great care has been taken to sow this land with a wealth of legend, powerful characters and glittering prizes, the sum of these parts lacks colour."

The maps are drawn in the standard *Forgotten Realms* style using primary colours. While portraying accurately the 'world being discovered' cartography, these are a rather annoying asset. Lacking any kind of co-ordinate system, each new city that's mentioned sends you back for yet another session of scouring these vast sheets for information. What's more, this activity isn't helped by the odd mistake – Port Llast becomes Fort Llast on the map, and I still can't find Trisk!

The Wilderness is an overview of this part of the world, taking care to establish the difference between places, to lay down time lines and to build up the world north of Waterdeep. Each area is assessed for its orc raiding tendencies, elf magic potential and the populace's attitude to foreigners, magic and the like. Further details are offered on characters and the powers of the realm.

Covering such a vast area so quickly, though, leaves the Wilderness with a scant, breathless feel as it rushes between locations. The coverage is competent, but as is the nature of such overviews, the descriptions are functional lists of facts and stats, with little time for embellishments. Consequently, the cold land described comes over in an almost lifeless manner.

Tangled Webs, reviewed on page 81, may star a Drow but it is set in Ruathym, Luskan and Waterdeep. It provides an excellent intro to the thoughts and actions of the fierce folk who live up North. It lets you hear conversations, get to grips with the theology and see the society 'live' in such a way as to make the world work. It's also a fun read. So if you want to dabble with *The North* but don't want to shell out for the full expansion, why not buy *Tangled Webs* as a taster?

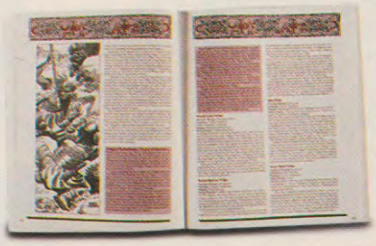


The Cities book gets a little more personal, dropping in on each town and city in the North just long enough to introduce you to all the important folk. At times this book could almost be mistaken for a Good Pub Guide, because the only notable feature listed for many of the smaller towns is an inn, but then adventurers are much more likely to be looking for a hot meal and a large mug of ale than the nearest craft shop. However, working with actual buildings ensures that most of their owners as well as their histories are discussed.

The final tome, Daggerford, takes one of these cities and fleshes it out with folk of all colours and creeds, illustrating just how life goes on in a harsh frontier town. Daggerford itself is a little sparse, almost to the point of being bleak, but that reflects the very real nature of these lawless lands. The true nature of the North is forged from the fact that everyone in Daggerford appears to be an adventurer – either retired, learning or on sabbatical. The result is a rich mine of rumour, skill and knowledge from which great adventures can be created.

Together these elements combine to show precisely how a DM can take a black dot on the map, use the Wilderness to define the local climate, Cities to find out the general details of the town and then, using the Daggerford example, build a functioning Northern 'world'.

While great care has been taken to sow this land with a wealth of legend, powerful characters and glittering prizes, the sum of these parts lacks colour. It's a functional guide, a roadmap more than a tourist handbook, and only a few locations set the brain racing. There are some strong adventure ideas here, but these are not delivered on a plate, so referees will have to put the hours in if they are to create ongoing adventures in the frozen wastes. It's also annoying that the example city is Daggerford. This town clings on to the Southern border, and is too close to the well chronicled Waterdeep to develop a truly different character.

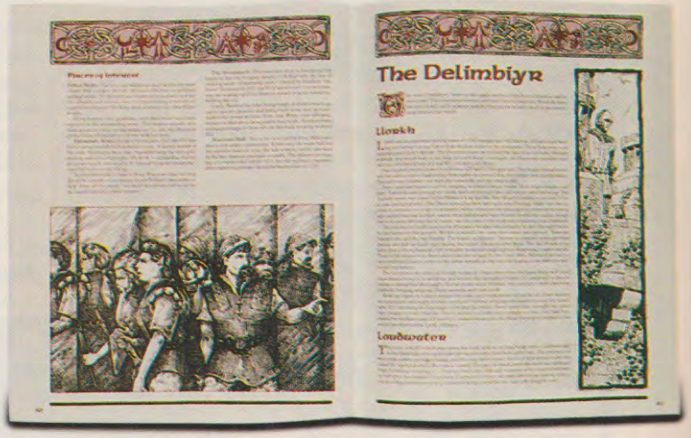


The North does offer enough nuggets of information to make it a suitable base for a campaign. Players who wander this way will find a refreshingly uncluttered place that allows – almost encourages – folks to go about their hacking business. What's needed now is background material in the form of novels and specific adventures. If this is brave enough to stand out from the rest of the *Forgotten Realms*, the North could become a very interesting place indeed.

Trenton Webb

A castle called the Bargewright Inn? Is this supposed to be some kind of joke? If you were Fenston Bargewright and wanted to build a little fort, you'd think you'd choose a name that was a little less inviting!

Score 6/10



Daggerford: home of heroes

The example city offered in *The North* expansion pack is a potent place indeed. A large town of some 500 residents, with some 700 outlying dependents, almost 100 are qualified NPCs with defined names, skills and access to magic weapons.

In the single class bracket Daggerford boasts a druid, ranger, two cavaliers, two illusionists, two bards, eight clerics, ten wizards, ten priests, 16 thieves and 36 fighters, while its multiclass club has four fighter/mages, three fighter/clerics, a mage/priest and a mage/fighter/thief.

And these aren't folk of lowly skills, with the numbers bumped up by a 30-strong militia of 1st level fighters. There's a 13th level fighter, 14th level wizard, 12th level thief, 12th level bard, 10th level cleric, 9th level druid and a fighter/mage who demands most respect with a mighty 12th/15th split.

And Daggerford is, allegedly, representative of all the cities in the North. So if you end up swaggering around the taverns here, watch who's pint you spill...

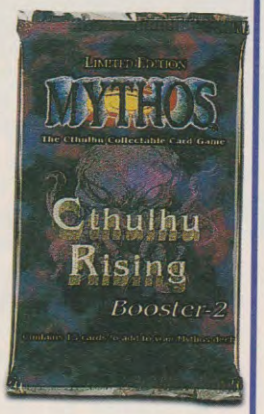
Cthulhu Rising

An expansion set for *Mythos* £2.25 for a 13-card booster Chaosium

001 510 547 7681 Out now

take a trip to the south pacific for some unearthly goings-on...

With the new expansion set of cards for Chaosium's innovative CCG *Mythos*, we take just a few more tentative steps towards the brink of complete and utter insanity. Not that we weren't pretty close to it in the first place, you understand. For this new set, as indeed the name would suggest, leads the way to R'lyeh, where Great Cthulhu lies sleeping, waiting for the night when the stars are 'right'.



You get a very definite sense of acceleration when you're using the *Cthulhu Rising* cards in your deck – they make the game seem a fair bit quicker, even though each session is going to take just as long to complete. Part of the reason for this feeling is the variety of locations introduced – you can now visit the South Pacific islands, and even delve down deep beneath the surface of the sea in your search for arcane knowledge.

Although there's nothing particularly innovative in terms of alteration of game mechanics here, this expansion does differ from the original set (and the first expansion, which was launched simultaneously), in that it has a lot of cross-referencing cards, whereby the effect of one specifically alters the effect of another. Although it does mean that deck building becomes considerably more fun, this also has the potential to upset all those players who simply can't afford to buy a great many cards (because they might not come across the exact cards they need in the boosters they buy).

It's a shame, but the South Pacific feel which I was hoping would pervade this expansion set isn't anywhere near as obvious as it might have been. The simple reason for this is that not enough of the cards are of this bent. The boosters, as with the first expansion, contain a roughly 50/50 split between the new cards and those from the basic set, and this dilutes the personality of both expansions, this one especially so. Indeed, I feel that mixing standard-set cards into this second expansion is a mistake – fine, put them in the first expansion (which I thought of almost as boosters for the starter decks), but it's best not to keep with that trend for future expansion sets.

The artwork, as with the *Mythos* cards we've seen thus far, is hugely mixed in style (from the chaotic, surrealistic splashes of colour by Michael Kellner, to the simple, more reserved pen and ink-based sketches of Dennis J Calero). Of course this variation is no bad thing, but there's also a variation in the quality of the work, and that's not good to see.

You may have gathered by now that this expansion set, strong though many of the cards are, hasn't really grabbed me in the way that *Mythos* did – the main reason being that it doesn't have an easily discernable personality of its own. Without the basic set cards diluting the set, I'd have liked it a lot more.

Paul Pettengale

Score 6/10

Player's Secrets of Baruk-Azhik

A sourcebook for *Birthright*

£4.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

The *Player's Secrets* series is designed to give *Birthright* players and referees thrilling domains. In this book, the focus turns away from the human realms and to the dwarven domain of Baruk-Azhik, found within the Iron Peaks.

As a newly-appointed Overthane, the player is privy to riches in the form of minerals, gemstones and Moraskorr ore. However, there is a bleak side to this prosperous realm. Lying within the shadow of the Gorgon means a constant threat looms over the dwarven race – with the awnshegh known as the Chimaera settled in the Promontory province of the domain, and rumour of another vile creature trapped within a north-western province, the dwarves are seemingly besieged. The most prominent danger comes in the face of the expanding orog hordes under the dwarven settlements – armies that the dwarves know they cannot defeat.

Baruk-Azhik is a great volume, and presents a comprehensive depiction of the dwarven race and its battle for survival. The author describes in detail every aspect of dwarven life – from a brief history of the race to their culture and guilds.

Unlike other Secrets volumes, the adventure hooks provided are original and exciting. As an alien race, the dwarves are not fully understood by the humans that border their lands, and the plots described play on this. In common with the other volumes, though, the layout, artwork and general presentation is excellent.

At £4.99 this is an essential guide to not only the dwarven realm, but also the dwarven people.

David Cornford Score 9/10

Deathkeep

A roleplaying game for the PC

£39.99 SSI/Mindscape

01444 246333 Out now

For one reason or another, many of the software companies involved in producing computer roleplaying games seem to have decided that the key to success is to make the games less complicated. Character generation, detailed statistics and many of the other traditional elements of computer roleplaying games are

becoming less and less common, replaced with simpler controls and 'transparent' rules systems.

On the surface, then, *Deathkeep* must have seemed like a good idea, combining a traditional *AD&D* dungeon bash with the fast-moving action of the current rash of first-person 3D games spawned by id Software's *Doom*.

Unfortunately, the original version for the 3DO console was less than inspiring, and this substandard conversion to the PC is even less so. At the beginning of the game you have to choose from one of three characters – a Dwarven Fighter, Elven Mage or Half-Elf Fighter-Mage – and then proceed to enter a vast castle that has been taken over by an evil Necromancer. Your task is to explore the place in search of three orbs, which you can then use to defeat the powerful mage.

Unfortunately, *Deathkeep* suffers from awful graphics, low-quality sound and uninspiring gameplay, all of which combine to create one of the worst games released on the PC in some time. Try as you might, there's simply nothing you can find to recommend it. If you want a fast-paced fantasy game that's heavy on the combat and light on rules, *Hexen* is infinitely better than this, and you can get the first episode as shareware for nothing.

Andy Butcher Score 2/10

Field Guides: Northern Vehicles 2 and Southern Vehicles 2

Two sourcebooks for *Heavy Gear*
£8.99 each Dream Pod 9
001 514 523 1350 Out now

Yet more meaty hardware for tech-heads arrives in the *Northern Vehicles 2 and Southern Vehicles 2* catalogues for Dream Pod 9's roleplay and wargame universe of *Heavy Gear*. Like the previous *Field Guide* volumes, each has a spread of old and new vehicles detailed with tech specs, variants, full record sheets and illustrations. As well as designs, the books also have three new weapon components and four new 'perks' for use with *Heavy Gear's* construction rules. Because *Heavy Gear* is based around warfare between 12 foot tall power armour suits, the guides both lead with eight new Gear designs: two Striders, assorted tanks and transports, and a stealth fighter. Bound into the middle of each book is a sheet of 30-plus colour counters for use in table-top gaming. →

Threats

A sourcebook for *Shadowrun* £10.99
FASA 001 312 243 5660 Out now

The sixth world may be a far more dangerous place than you thought...

Conspiracy theories have always been popular. The speculation surrounding the Kennedy assassination and the current resurgence of interest in aliens and UFOs have just gone to prove the fascination that they hold for many people. Of course, in the real world there's a limit to just how bizarre and outlandish a conspiracy theory can be, and still maintain some degree of plausibility. But in a world where magic works, other dimensions exist and a dragon can run for US president, the sky's the limit.

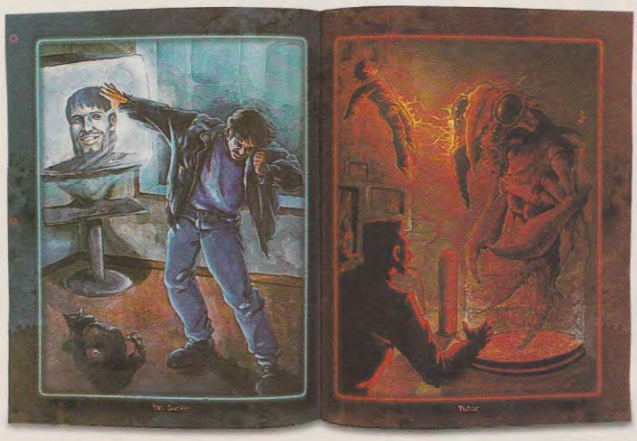
Threats is a collection of conspiracy theories for the world of *Shadowrun*. As with all *Shadowrun* sourcebooks, it's formatted as an electronic document posted to the fictional *Shadowland* BBS, and describes 14 of the most powerful and dangerous organisations, individuals and entities that may (or may not) exist in the Sixth World of 2057. Each entry is split into two sections, beginning with the details posted to the BBS, complete with additional comments from characters in the gameworld, followed by a referee's section discussing the realities of the threat and offering suggestions for how it might be used in the game.

The threats described and their intentions and goals vary widely. Several, including Lofwyr, the insect spirits and Alamos 20,000, will already be familiar to experienced players and referees, but are described in more detail or given new twists. Others are completely new to this book, or have only been hinted at previously. The introduction and the individual referee's sections all give useful advice on using threats in a *Shadowrun* game, and stress that not all of the threats described may actually exist, at least not in the form presented here.

The obvious question here is whether or not *Shadowrun* actually needs more potential opponents – after all, the megacorporations offer more than enough potential for several campaigns. However, as *Threats* points out, while the megacorporations possess seemingly limitless resources, they are, in reality, nothing more than large businesses, and like all businesses are motivated simply by profit. The groups and individuals described here differ in both their aims and their means – they want to change the world, and they may very well have the power to do it. These are not simple 'one shot' baddies, to be used in a single adventure and then forgotten, but forces to base a whole campaign around.

It's in this regard that *Threats* succeeds admirably. As well as offering alternatives to the traditional corporate bad guys, the book expands *Shadowrun's* scope. Referees may not find themselves directly using a great deal of the material presented here, but they will certainly find a lot of inspiration for their games.

Andy Butcher

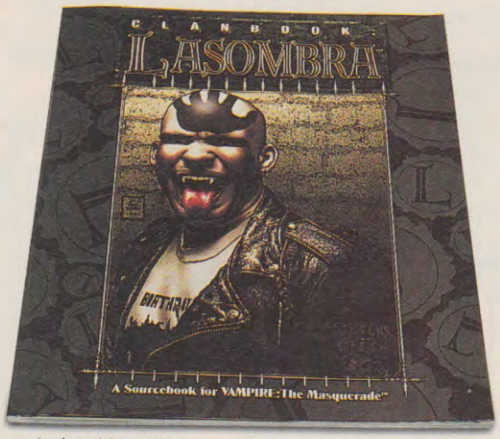


Clanbook: Lasombra

A sourcebook for *Vampire: The Masquerade* £8.99 White Wolf

001 404 292 1819 Out now

Among the many splinter groups that make up vampire society, the Lasombra are the shadiest of characters. What secrets are they hiding?



The World of Darkness is a mean and decidedly nasty place, where evil lurks in the shadows and things definitely go bump in the night. Among the meanest and most decidedly nasty of characters are the vampires, and some of the most evil of the lurkers you'll find in any given shadow are the Lasombra. Fortunately, this clanbook allows you to play one of these, a predator rather than a victim, fleshing out all the details for a full and colourful character – the trademark of the Storyteller games.

In common with the other clanbooks released by White Wolf, *Lasombra* offers all its information in a narrative style, as if you were a new initiate being taught by one of the elders. This is great for atmosphere, but rules junkies will need to look elsewhere. There *are* a few new merits, flaws and powers, and the character templates help with ideas when putting your character together, but the majority of the slender, 76-page volume is devoted to background.

In the first section you get a brief story introducing you to the narrator, which is crisply told and fun to read. This sets the pace which enables White Wolf to get away with the conceit of 'I/we' gamebook text, with the reader being talked at as if this were a cosy fireside chat rather than a roleplaying supplement. Remembering that clanbooks are designed for players adding new members of a given clan, this all works rather nicely.

However, much of the information included, such as the lengthy history of the clan and the Noteworthy Lasombra section tucked into the back of the book, will be of equal use to a referee planning on including *Lasombra* NPCs in his or her campaign. If that's you, then the style of the book may grate after a while as you sift through the sections for information and relevant details.

This isn't to say that the *Lasombra* clanbook isn't a good read in its own right, or that you won't get everything you need to make a perfectly three-dimensional character. It's just that, compared with the semi-factual, semi-fictional style of Werewolf's *Tribebooks*, it's tougher going on a referee, restricting itself to total immersion in Lasombra culture for a player's benefit.

As with all White Wolf products, the quality of presentation is paramount. The internal spot art, the text fonts and even the paper used all go some way towards making *Clanbook: Lasombra* an absorbing read. By the end, you will have been inside the head of the average clan member (not a particularly pleasant place by all accounts), and be ready to act and react in character throughout your game.

As such, this book is an unequivocal success, and if you have any inclination to play a half-crazed, shadowy Sabbat schemer from Marrakesh or Madrid, then you are unlikely to regret spending your money on it. Even accepting the proviso above, referees too can benefit greatly from its contents.

Martin Klimes

Score 8/10

← The new Gear designs are in much the same vein as previous versions, and it's a little disappointing to see familiar frames repeated again and again. While realistic, there's not much here to wow you. That said, a *Heavy Gear* referee low on time or creativity has a ready-made strike force in each guide for both of the gameworld's major forces, and the inclusion of the transport plane and stealth fighter designs foreshadows the upcoming aircraft supplement (look out for a review in the next issue of **arcane**).

For the most part, the *Field Guides* are of the most use to wargamers using the *Heavy Gear* background, while roleplayers will likely see the mecha showcased here in the hands of NPCs and the enemy. Like most of the *Heavy Gear* material currently available, the books are produced with an eye to clarity and careful precision, and with a degree of modularity which means they don't have to be an essential purchase.

Jim Swallow Score 5/10

Ancient Hearts

An expansion for *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle*
12-card booster pack £1.85
Wizards of the Coast
0345 125599 Out now

For many people, collectable card games have expansion sets for the explicit reason of adding a little pep to a game in which all the cards are getting known a bit too well. *Ancient Hearts* will appeal to such *V:TES* players in the same way as the previous expansion, *Dark Sovereigns*, did. There's plenty of scope for anything from adding a few unexpected cards to your killer hand, right up to creating completely new theme decks. There are two new clans – the Followers of Set and Assamites – both of whom specialise in new disciplines and have new skills, meaning that you'll see yourself taking on different tactics rather than the normal 'beat them to death/vote them to death' routine with the basic game.

The setting for these 12-card boosters, the Middle East, lends itself well to some lovely art and some interesting location cards in particular (the Opium Den being one of my personal favourites). This leads to plenty of atmosphere for you to get your teeth into.

Behind the scenes it is clear that Wizards of the Coast is still tweaking *V:TES* a little. The mix of minion cards and vampires chosen for *Ancient Hearts* has

helped round off a few rough edges, making the game less formulaic even with a regular group of players. There is now pretty much always a good attack you can choose, and almost always a choice of defences against it. *Ancient Hearts* will add significant interest to your games, which is all you can ask of any expansion.

Martin Klimes Score 8/10

Foxbat Unhinged

A scenario for *Champions*
£5.50 Atlas Games
001 612 638 0077 Out now

Ever since *Watchmen*, superhero comics have had a tendency to be appallingly dark and serious. Superheroic roleplaying games have often followed suit. However, this collection of short scenarios and scenario ideas represents an admirable attempt to inject some old-style fun and silliness back into the genre.

And when I say silliness, that's exactly what I mean. One of the adventure seeds has the PC heroes standing in for Santa Claus on Christmas Eve. Another has them transported to Valhalla to act as referees in the on-going battles between indestructible Viking heroes. (Okay, things like this did used to happen to Superman from time to time, but usually only in dream sequences.)

The extended scenarios are rather less cartoony – one begins with the PCs being visited by a time traveller from the future, and ends up with them trying to engineer a love affair between a millionaire and a lab assistant at a fancy dress party. (And yes, you guessed – half a dozen fellow guests have turned up dressed as the supervillain.) The other begins with someone stealing the Eiffel tower, and goes downhill from there.

The 'Foxbat' of the title is the villain of most of the pieces, a comic book fanboy who originally wanted to be a superhero, but subsequently went mad and turned into a villain when his parents died. Mad enough to be a nuisance but not powerful enough to be really dangerous, he could turn into an excellent running gag in many campaigns.

If you are running the sort of four-colour campaign that can cope with the injection of some serious weirdness, this book is certainly worth a glance. Whether it is actually worth spending £5.50 on 30 pages of large type is another question.

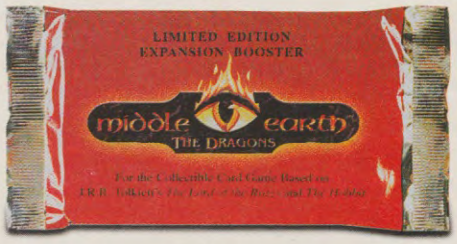
Andrew Rilstone Score 6/10

Middle-earth: The Dragons

An expansion set for *Middle-earth: The Wizards* 15-card booster pack £2.35

ICE 001 800 325 0479 Out now

The dragons have arrived, and *middle-earth* just got a whole lot deadlier.



Considering that *The Hobbit* revolved around an attempt to steal a dragon's treasure and Tolkien's works make frequent reference to these mighty creatures, dragons were a little thin on the ground in ICE's *Middle-earth: The Wizards*. Luckily for fans of fire-breathing reptiles with wings, this, the first expansion set for the game, introduces nine of the most powerful dragons from *Middle-earth's* history to the game.

Each dragon is associated with a specific site card which represents its lair (Smaug, for example, lairs in The Lonely Mountain), and is represented in the game by three different cards, each representing the dragon in a different manifestation – basic, hunt and at home. The first represents the dragon in its 'normal' state, as a standard creature card (some of which were already present in *Middle-earth: The Wizards)*. The second is a hazard long-event that automatically attacks companies moving in a specific set of regions. The third is a hazard long-event that gives its lair an additional automatic attack, as well as other effects. More than one manifestation of a specific dragon can be in play at the same time, but once one has been defeated, all are removed from the game.

As well as the dragons themselves, the 180 new cards in *Middle-earth: The Dragons* introduce a new form, the Hoard Item. These cards can only be played at a site with a dragon automatic attack, and cannot be used as starting items. To compensate for this, many are slightly more powerful than standard items of a similar nature.

The rest of the set is rounded out by a selection of new cards of all types, excluding regions. Many of these are related to dragons in some way – Dragon's Breath, Bounty of the Hoard and so on – but not all. In addition, each booster pack contains a six-page rules insert, explaining the use of the dragons, lairs and hoard items, as well as offering clarifications, some new rules (including an increase to the size of the sideboard), and a scenario based on the *Middle-earth: The Dragons* cards.

Middle-earth: The Wizards is, undeniably, one of the most complex and challenging card games around. However, it's also one of the most satisfying and rewarding. Impressively, *Middle-earth: The Dragons* manages to emphasise the positive aspects of the game, without adding greatly to the already weighty rules. Many of the new cards – especially the dragons – make the game a lot more dangerous and deadly, and the set as a whole significantly increases the variety of hazard and resource strategies available to players. Overall, then, this is a very good first expansion set, and if ICE can maintain this level of creativity and quality in further releases, the future looks very rosy for *Middle-earth: The Wizards*.

Andy Butcher

Score 8/10

Celestial Chorus Tradition Book

A sourcebook for *Mage: The Ascension* £5.99 White Wolf

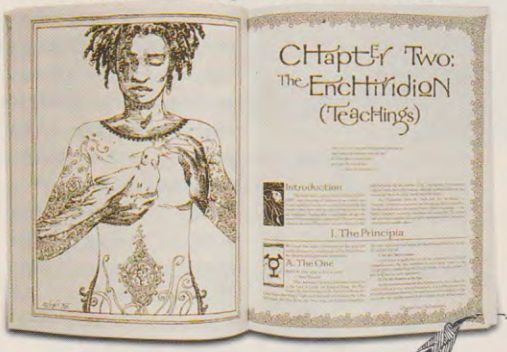
001 404 292 1819 Out now

who says christianity has no place in roleplaying games?

Clerics have always been regarded as the poor cousins of other magic-using types since the early days of roleplaying. The Traditions of magick in *Mage: The Ascension* bear little relation to the stalwart wizards of fantasy gaming, but they still have the Celestial Chorus as the token religious types.

Whatever your feelings on religion, it is inevitable that for all but the most committed roleplayer, rather than gamer, sticking to a poorly-disguised version of the Christian ideal will seem restricting when compared with the more flashy mad scientists of the Sons of Æther or the hedonistic Cult of Ecstasy.

This *Tradition Book*, the fifth in the series, sets out to change that. Breaking with the narrative format



of previous books, it is presented as extracts from the latest edition of *The Book of Ages*, the central codex of the Chorus throughout its millennia of existence. While this makes for a less involving read, it does allow the book to better represent the differing views and opinions that divide the Chorus.

And divided and fractured it has been. The Chorus has, in its time, been involved in the persecution of non-Christian religions, the Inquisition, and spawned the group that would go on to be the core of the Chorus' greatest enemy, the Technocracy.

The predominately Christian nature of the Tradition is finally acknowledged, and the absence of many of the other strong world religions is explained through the Chorus' relationships with the other Traditions. That said, it does, both through the history and attitudes outlined and through the sample characters given, feasibly allow a Chorus member to hail from any religion that has, at its core, the belief in one central deity. Indeed, it is made perfectly clear that the Chorus is actively seeking to bring Muslims under its extending wing.

However, the book falls prey to the typical White Wolf failing of getting so caught up in an idea that practicality falls by the wayside. The history of the tradition is there for you to read and appreciate. Jolly well thought out it is too. But the practical day to day existence of the Chorus in the modern game environment is all but ignored. The idea that each Tradition has a very distinct paradigm of reality, with a different style of magick to match is central to *Mage*. Sadly, the magickal side of the Chorus has been treated as if it were superfluous.

For any player keen to take on the playing of such a religious character, this book provides a valuable grounding in the origin of the movement. But crucial elements that both players and storytellers alike will be looking for are sadly lacking. This is something of a missed opportunity.

Adam Tinworth

Score 5/10

Book of the Kindred

A sourcebook for *Vampire: The Masquerade*

£6.99 White Wolf

001 404 292 1819 Out now

In the USA at the moment, Aaron Spelling – he of *Beverly Hills 90210* fame – is airing his latest creation, a show called *Kindred: The Embraced*. By all accounts it's a vampire soap opera based on White Wolf's *World of Darkness*, and there's plenty of discussion behind closed doors as to whether it's the best thing since sliced jugulars.

The buzz itself is what counts for White Wolf, though, which is keen to convert all those TV viewers into roleplaying, fiction reading, booster pack-buying devotees of the Storytelling series of products. To this end, it's written *Book of the Kindred* as a sort of *World of Darkness* primer, full of short unrelated chapters, all designed to enthuse rather than inform.

The material is of good quality, with descriptions of the Camarilla, of the language of the damned, some short stories set in White Wolf's beloved San Francisco, and even an extract of the Book of Nod. However, it's all window dressing to convert a channel-hopping TV audience into a gameplaying mass readership. There is nothing here that the *Vampire: The Masquerade* rulebook doesn't offer. If you know what *Vampire* is about, then you have no use for this book. If you don't then maybe you can justify buying it, even without seeing the series to get you interested. Maybe. Frankly, if you're a roleplayer then you will know if you're interested in roleplaying, and a glance through the rulebook will impart just as much information. Buy that instead, and *Book of the Kindred* be damned.

Martin Klimes Score 3/10

Settlers 2

A strategy game for the PC

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One of the neatest strategy games of recent years, *Settlers* was an instant hit on both the PC and the Amiga. Now German company Blue Byte has returned with this imaginatively-titled sequel.

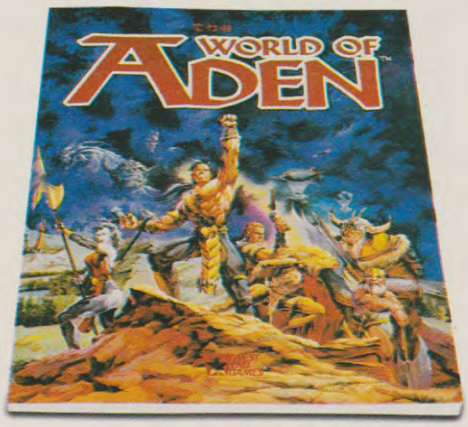
On the surface, *Settlers 2* bears more than a passing resemblance to the original game. From an isometric view you control

The World of Aden

A roleplaying game setting £13.95 West End Games

001 717 253 6990 Out now

from pen and paper to computer screen and back again.



Over the years several roleplaying systems have been used as the basis for computer RPGs, the best known being SSI's *AD&D* series for the Amiga and the PC. Now the process has come full circle, with the world of a computer RPG being used as the basis for a tabletop game. *The World of Aden* is a setting designed for use with West End Games' Masterbook and D6 systems, and is based on a background developed by SSI and used in two PC games: *Thunderscape* (reviewed in **arcane** 1) and *Entomorph* (**arcane** 2).

Until recently Aden was a paradise, having existed in a Golden Age of peace for over 800 years, followed by 200 years of technological development, known as the Age of Thunder. Then the Darkfall began.

Heralded by an eclipse of the sun, the Darkfall began when vicious monsters of myth and legend suddenly returned to the world. Hordes of the Nocturnals quickly overran the unprepared nations of Aden, and a new age of chaos and evil began. Ten years later the surviving nations of Aden stand on the brink of collapse. The unending years of war have taken their toll, and tens of thousands have lost their lives. Without understanding of the origins of the Darkfall, it cannot be stopped.

Aden is an interesting world, combining elements of traditional fantasy with steampunk – Mechamages are able to combine magic with rudimentary steam technology and black powder to create a range of extremely bizarre machines and devices – and several other fascinating and unique ideas. The advent of the Darkfall provides many foes for heroic adventurers to overcome, and the setting is certainly different enough to hold the attention of all but the most jaded of gamers.

In 144 pages, *The World of Aden* does an admirable job of describing the world, its peoples and its history, complete with a new magic system, background options, character templates and more. The book is mainly written in a first-person style, but remains clear and easy to follow. Individual chapters deal with the world as a whole, its nations, races, technology, significant cities, sorcery, monsters and character creation.

Unfortunately, while the book succeeds at sketching out the basics of the world, it rarely finds the space to go into detail. There are a lot of good ideas here, and an inventive referee looking for a slightly different setting could do a lot worse than to pick this up, whether you're familiar with the Masterbook and D6 systems or not. Bear in mind, though, that while the book serves as a good background reference, a lot of work will need to be done before starting a campaign in Aden.

Andy Butcher

Score 6/10

the expansion and development of a small tribe of people. By selecting sites for buildings, and linking them together with paths, you expand your tribe's influence and development. Each of the available buildings performs a task, and together they create a thriving economy. You can prospect for deposits of iron, gold, coal and granite, for example, and then build mines to extract them. Constructing an Iron Smelter will then allow you produce ingots of iron, which can be used by a Smithy to produce swords for soldiers.

As well as adding new buildings and resources, *Settlers 2* also has improved graphics and supports multi-player games. Big fans of the original will find more than enough new stuff to keep them occupied, while the simplicity of the game's controls enable newcomers to easily get to grips with it. *Settlers 2* is a great strategy game that's deceptively addictive and absorbing.

Andy Butcher **Score 8/10**

Southern Gondor: The Lands

A sourcebook for *Middle-earth Roleplaying*

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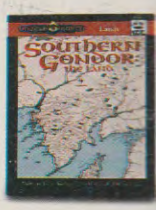


Designed to compliment *Southern Gondor: The People, The Lands* is a sourcebook for *MERP* which describes the coastal provinces of Gondor in detail.

The book is split into six main sections. The first is an encyclopaedia-like Gazetteer of names, places, settlements and other terms. There are chapters about the major cities in the area, and the big castles, citadels and other structures. Following these are two 'mini campaigns' set in the area at different times. Finally there's a group of tables giving game statistics for characters and creatures.

As well as profuse descriptions of just about everything, there are numerous maps and diagrams of locations, towns and buildings. Combined with *Southern Gondor: The People*, there's more than enough background here for the referee to become an expert on every aspect of the area. Just how useful a lot of this detail is in gaming terms is somewhat debatable, although there's no denying that if it's authenticity you're after, you'll find it here.

The Lands is pricey, though, especially considering that you really need *Southern Gondor: The People* as well.

Andy Butcher **Score 6/10**

Chicago Chronicles Volume 1

A supplement for *Vampire: The Masquerade* £14.99 White Wolf

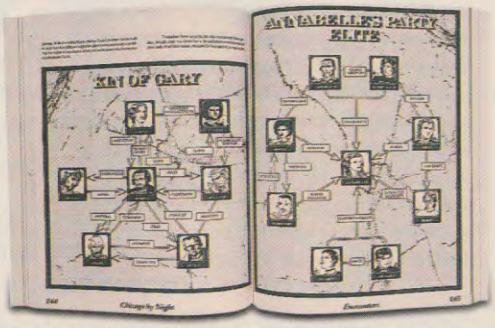
001 404 292 1819 Out now

you're new in town, aren't you?

Chicago was the first setting for the *Vampire* game and White Wolf is now republishing all the source material, beginning with *Chicago by Night* and *The Succubus Club*. This is a straight reprint of the First Edition material with absolutely nothing revised or added, complete with the original mistakes and the original page references to the First Edition rulebook.

Chicago by Night is the largest city sourcebook, as befits the city with the biggest population of Kindred and some of the most powerful. The history and geography of the city is reinterpreted through the eyes of the vampires who shaped it. An enormous cast of vampires are given their own full histories and roleplaying notes, and the alliances and enmities between them are clearly and succinctly explained. Nearly 200 encounters are included to provide atmosphere, suggest plotlines and offer glimpses of the city's secrets.

The Succubus Club is a nightclub run by Kindred for Kindred, proving the Dead Can Dance as long as its



to a soundtrack of the Sisters of Mercy. It is designed as a place for the Damned to meet on neutral territory, a nexus point for schemes and stories. There are extensive details of the history and layout of the club, its staff and customers (human and vampire) and, of course, its dark secrets.

The club can be an adventure in itself, but also acts as the focal point for a series of short scenarios. Challenges include a Toreador party that is sabotaged, a real life game of chess, a disease that turns vampires into homicidal maniacs and a hunt for a rogue Tremere. While combat is often very tough, the emphasis is on moral and emotional battles. These adventures are quality entertainment in their own right, but also

introduce the players to the city's major characters and their web of intrigues. It is this overall framework that gives the adventures extra depth and dramatic power.

There are nearly 300 pages of densely packed information here which will keep a high-quality campaign running for years. It is admirable not just for the strong cast of characters, but the rich and complex emotional connections between them – fertile ground for endless plotlines. The endless layers of political intrigue provide a constant background mystery for the players to explore, and the designers have left them enough scope to play their own games. The PCs are allowed choices and those choices have a very real impact on the city.

This reprint claims to be the classic sourcebook for *Vampire* and it lives up to its boast admirably. It is one of the most complete and best gaming settings for any system and I recommend it unreservedly for those who haven't already enjoyed its night life. If only it'd been updated to 2nd Edition, and the mistakes corrected, then it would have been perfect.

Mark Barter

Score 9/10

Advanced Magic: The Gathering Totally Unauthorized

A player's guide for *Magic: The Gathering*

£13.50 Brady Games Out now

What good is a *Magic* guide like this which only covers Type 1 decks? Not much. Type 1 decks are those that feature all those old, hard to find cards such as Black Lotuses and Moxes, and as such are beyond the reach of anybody who's just started to play *Magic*. Nine of the ten decks featured in this guide have a Black Lotus and at least three Moxes in them. And I suspect that if you are the kind of player who already has all these cards there's not going to be much that a book like this will teach you, because only the most dedicated *Magic* players are in that situation. Added to which, Wizards of the Coast is now de-emphasising Type 1 tournaments and concentrating on Type 2.

Which is a shame, because this is a well-composed book, featuring tournament tips from ten highly respected *Magic* players. There *is* some general stuff about playing, most notably in the introductory chapters, but it doesn't justify £13.50.

Of course my criticisms of this book may seem a little severe; there is a companion volume (reviewed in **arcane** 8) aimed at a more general audience, but nonetheless I cannot imagine who will buy this book. At one point the editor suggests that if you can't get hold of Type 1 cards you should play in Type 2 tournaments, where they're often offered as prizes, until you have enough to build a Type 1 deck. I can't imagine that anybody who has experienced the fun and balance of playing Type 2 games will want to go back to Type 1, where winning the game really does depend on what cards you have.

Steve Faragher Score 4/10

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The Great Library

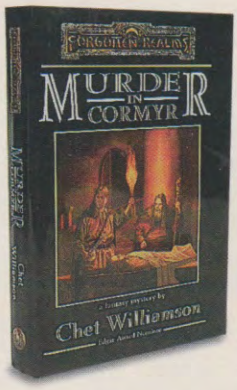
This month, we exclusively review the latest TSR releases...

TSR SPECIAL

Murder in Cormyr

A *Forgotten Realms* novel by Chet Williamson

Published by TSR Hardback £10.99 Out now



Murder in Cormyr is certainly better than the other fantasy mystery I've reviewed this month, *Murder in Tarsis* (see the review opposite) – although that in itself is not a particularly remarkable achievement. *Cormyr's* strength is simply that it serves as a reminder that there is a certain amount of mileage to be had out of the fantasy whodunnit, after all.

The story reads just like an age-old Agatha Christie-style chestnut given the TSR treatment. This time we have Miss Marple in the guise of a rather plump and bearded wizard, her earnest nephew becoming a halfling servant, and the predictably dim-witted detective, the captain of the local militia. The idyllic village (which is filled with all kinds of passionate intrigues, of course) is dumped in the middle of an enormous supernatural swamp. Add a couple of bodies for good measure, and it all sounds extremely promising, doesn't it?

"'Barkeep!' she said to Shortshanks. 'Why don't you toss this bat's dropping out of your establishment?'"

Unfortunately, it is not nearly as clever, involved or funny as it might have been. Terry Pratchett did a much better satire of the murder mystery with *Feet of Clay* (**arcane** 8), and while we can't demand writing of his extremely high calibre in books of this nature, this – like so many other game tie-in efforts – leaves you with the impression of it having been banged out, rather than thought out with any degree of care and attention. Still, at least the butler didn't do it. More tea, vicar?

Gideon Kibblewhite

Score 4/10

Winged Magic

A *Dark Horse* novel by Mary H Herbert Published by TSR
Paperback £4.99 Out now

Both of my sisters are into horses, though I have to admit that I'm anything but. They're far too big, hairy, and they kick (not that I've ever been kicked by one, but I imagine it would hurt). Strange then, that I actually quite enjoyed this quaint tale of human/equine relationships, where sentient horses converse fluently with their two-footed pals. Sure, I kept on having flashbacks to Mr Ed, which kind of spoiled the atmosphere upon occasion, but, other than that, this novel rather grabbed me.

"'Something has happened' she said in a soft tone that was terribly certain."

I think it's because I've been reading too much 'gritty' fantasy recently, and this is anything but. It's a sugar-coated tale of good versus evil, of betrayal and broken truces, which culminates in the inevitable battle where (I may be ruining things for you here, but it wouldn't take a genius to work it out...) good prevails. The characters are soft and understated, and perhaps more believable for it, and although the writing is hardly world-class, it maintains a pace which carries you gently through the book without you really noticing. Yes, this is fun, with a distinctly feminine touch, and though saccharine, I think it's worth checking out.

Paul Pettengale Score 7/10

The Dragons at War

A *Dragonlance* collection edited by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman

Published by TSR
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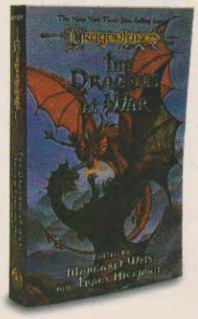

A new collection of tales to follow *The Dragons of Krynn* and featuring some of TSR's better known writers, such as Mark Anthony, Douglas Niles and including a collaboration by Margaret Weis herself. The lead is taken by Michael William's poem *Dream of the Namer*, which calmly sets the tone of the anthology, but this edition is essentially a showcase for up-and-coming writers and, unfortunately, they're not all particularly good. It's not that they can't write, but you get the impression they don't know what they should be writing

about. There are good ideas, such as Jeff Grubb's 'gnomite', a rock, which when refined produces 'Plus-Gnomium'; a pound of this stuff will produce an explosion capable of creating a crater half a mile wide and a fire storm of four to six miles across. The gnomes have developed cold fusion. This is an amusing tale, but some of the other tales, though they wander articulately, too often tend to go nowhere for 20 pages and then end.

So, as you move from story to story, this produces a jarring distinction between those writers who are obviously comfortable in Krynn and those others who still have something to prove. Mark Anthony's use of the first person for the magic user, in the atmospheric *People of the Dragon,* is an example of the former. Some of the others leave you with the impression of having been produced by TSR's reserve team, though – newer, less experienced writers who will have to improve to make it in this genre. There are definitely some highlights among the tiros, though.

"...and do not believe this is changing, that the endings are happy, that the cycle of seasons awaits an eventual spring, that the sunrise riding the wake of the darkness is more than a mutual dream."

from *Dream of the Namer* by Michael Williams

Janet Pack's *Proper Tribute* is a prickly piece about how the enmity between dragon and rider turns to friendship in battle, while Chris Pierson's first published *Dragonlance* story demonstrates the affection for Krynn he is reported to have had since he was 12 – we'll see more of him, no doubt. But we may not see some of the other bards at Margaret Weis' storytellers' gathering at the Inn of the Last Home again.

Jonathan Palmer Score 5/10

Murder in Tarsis

A *Dragonlance* novel by John Maddox Roberts Published by TSR
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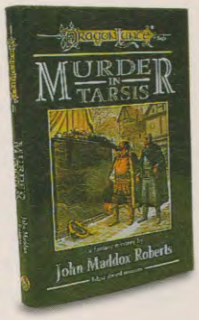


This uninspired and ultimately dismissible *Forgotten Realms* mystery is all the more disappointing because, given better handling and writing, it could have been a memorable fantasy. It certainly possesses enough ingredients for a classic tale: Tarsis, a once proud city by the sea, now landlocked and decaying because of a great catastrophe; a huge nomad army laying siege to its crumbling walls; and Ironwood, the tragic hero – a mercenary bearing the curse of the dragon he once slew.

As one of the characters points out, Ironwood's story is worthy of an epic poem. Sadly, though, *Murder in Tarsis* is just a weak murder story that goes the way of many *Forgotten Realms* efforts, into the arena of cut-out

"Misfortune? You do not yet know the meaning of the word, Lord of Tarsis, but you shall!"

characters, unconvincing scheming and cheesy endings. There may not be anything wrong with that, though – it's a formula that seems to sell well, and there is more than enough information here to create a place around which you can weave your own, hopefully better, webs.

One of the strongest images of the book is that of the city's decrepit old harbour, where hundreds of ships lie in perpetual dry-dock. Rotting and falling apart, they form a labyrinthine warren that is the home of many a strange creature. This should make a good location for an adventure, so it's a shame that this potentially wondrous place, in the end, fails to live up to its promise and doesn't seem wondrous at all.

Gideon Kibblewhite Score 3/10

Tangled Webs

A *Forgotten Realms* novel by Elaine Cunningham
Published by TSR Hardback £11.99 Out now

-movies aren't just fun because you can spot the wires, invariably predict the clichéd plot and see the sets wobble from time to time. They're enjoyable because you get the feeling that the crew had a brilliant time making them. *Tangled Webs* shares this sense of tongue-in-cheek, self-mocking, gung-ho fun in a non-stop barrage of increasingly hostile situations hung extremely loosely around a sketchy plot. Liriel, the oddest Drow you ever met and Fyodor, her Beserker boyfriend, hex and hack their way through an overly long sea voyage from Skullport to Ruathym. The obligatory political intrigue is supplied by the conspiracies of the Northern powers of the *Forgotten Realms.*

"'Call a Thing,' he demanded, using the ancient word for a Council of Law."

It's not the destination nor the schemes which are employed that are especially important though. It's the spirit that makes the book happen – the gut-spilling sword action, flashy spell casting and ensemble of characters pushes *Tangled Webs* from chapter to chapter with a wanton disregard for anything but having fun. The trip on the grand ship Elfmaid is made not just bearable but quite brilliant by the good Captain Hrolf setting up and solving all kinds of situations with a deft flick of a blade, a knowing glance or an impressive show of sheer bravado. His First Mate supplies sour-faced cynicism, and Xorsh the Sea-elf is your off-the-peg innocent. Together they roll across the ocean battling everything from Laskan pirates to vast Water Elementals.

With the principals foiling deadly threats at the last second while the supporting cast wander about inadvertently creating yet another world of trouble, each chapter of the book is an exciting adventure in itself. Unfortunately, some of the spells cast or actions taken are less than convincing, but nevertheless, it's pleasantly easy to get carried away with this wild romp.

Sadly, the bubbling wave of ever-increasing adventuring energy falters short of the final chapter, which results in the villains it's taken Liriel 300 pages to meet being dispatched in a mere line or two. This really is a shame, because the archetypal adventure heroes developed in this book deserve a much bigger showdown, and these few lines seem woefully inadequate for the job at hand. What's more, these evil controllers of mighty magic and vast armies fought in the final battle prove less threatening than the ghoul on page four!

Purists are bound to condemn *Tangled Webs* for Liriel's complete lack of Drowness. DMs trying to run the new *Forgotten Realms North* campaign may well curse it for giving away too many secrets of this new land. Literature heads will no doubt have a pop at it because it's a *Dungeons & Dragons* book and not a proper novel. But if, when you're completely honest, you prefer B-movies to art-house cinema, then you should give *Tangled Webs* a shot!

Trenton Webb

Score 7/10

The Rise and Fall of a Dragon King

A *Dark Sun* novel by Lynn Abbey Published by TSR
Paperback £4.99 Out now

Of all the *AD&D* 'worlds' I've played in, the *Dark Sun* setting is by far my favourite. It has to be said, it does have certain moralistic overtones (the environmental ones are pretty obvious), and this novel continues the trend (it even has a dedication to all those millions who have died because of the intolerance of others). Exacting vengeance is what this particular tale is all about. That, and the dangers of power when wielded by the foolish.

The basic premise is somewhat hackneyed. Chap's parents get killed. Chap goes after the killers. Chap becomes King of the World. Hmm, a rather grandiose leap there, but it all comes good (or rather bad) in the end, because Hamanu ultimately spells his own downfall through the execution of his extreme prejudices.

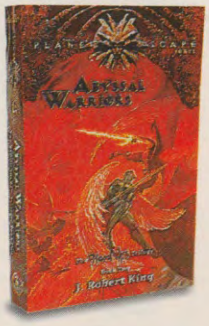
"With his loyal veterans behind him, he tracked down those who had betrayed him and humanity... and found that he had as much taste for human suffering as he had once had for trolls."

All this makes for an interesting story, embellished by the lurid descriptions of the cruel world in which it is set, but it's all highly predictable in its outcome (and not only because of the name of the book). You just *know* that because the lead character gets way too big for his boots he's going to end up coming a cropper. *Dark Sun* refs may want to check it out for the background details and the descriptive passages, but you wouldn't want to check it out for its plot.

Paul Pettengale Score 5/10

Abyssal Warriors

A *Planescape* novel by J Robert King
Published by TSR
Paperback £4.99 Out now



King is better known for his *Ravenloft* works, but here he proves he can write weirdly enough for *Planescape* as well. *Abyssal Warriors* is the second part of the *Bloodwars* trilogy that began with *Blood Hostages*. In both books the horror of *Planescape* is successfully evoked without getting you too bogged down in impossible-to-understand descriptions – the level of explanation is mystical rather than rational. As you start *Abyssal Warriors*, Aereas and Nina, though naive in the ways of the planes, have successfully rescued Artus from his kidnappers. Now Aereas must go to save his love from the underworld. Unfortunately, the planes have had their effect on the young girl and Aereas finds himself battling for her mind as well as her body as she becomes increasingly influenced by the forces of extreme evil that exist throughout the planes.

"It brings this rhino-crowned head of mine to turn down so that the clinging fly-bodies in the sockets hang black as fish eggs over empty air, over the tiny standing body of the war-bitch."

Now, isn't that just typical of a girl to get caught up in a mess like that? It is in many of these books, anyway – but let's not worry about that now.

As a novel then, this is tosh; as a sourcebook for an imaginative referee, however, it's another book chock-full of all sorts of completely horrid off-the-wall stuff from way out in the leftfield. Give it a go.

Jonathan Palmer Score 7/10

King of the Dead

A *Ravenloft* novel by Gene De Weese Published by TSR
Paperback £4.99 Out now

Gene De Weese is yet another *New York Times* best-selling author who has been persuaded by TSR to write an *AD&D*-based novel. The experience gained from over three dozen previously published horror, science fiction and non-fiction books has stood him in pretty good stead, and *King of the Dead* joins the ever-growing number of *Ravenloft* novels that are genuinely horrific.

The story concerns itself with Azalin, the king of the title. Despite the near-limitless powers that are now his to command, he is continually haunted by the death of his son. Unable to find any kind of happiness or contentment, he has begun to hate the dark, horror-filled world that is his to rule. *King of the Dead* recounts the tale of Azalin's earlier existence as a powerful mage and the events that led to

"Where it touched, its flesh was blending with Firan's, and its touch was inexorably spreading. His out-stretched hands, originally clamped in fury about the creature's neck, were now engulfed by it."

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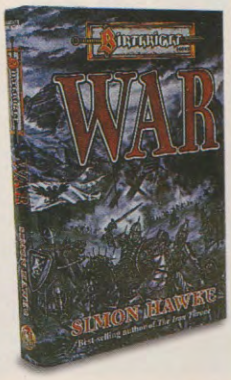
Because we've made this month's books section a TSR special, we thought we'd organise a special TSR competition, giving you the chance to win not only every TSR book reviewed this month, but a whole lot more besides. We will give them all to YOU if your choice of the three best TSR authors of all time corresponds with that of our editor – and your letter is drawn out of the arcane hat, which is very large. Write to "ooh ah TSR" at the usual address.

1. Closing dates are relative to each plane. But this competition will end when Notting Hill Carnival does.
2. Harpers work better together. Not so arcane competition entries.
3. Those blooded of Future and TSR shall not ascend the Throne.
4. The editor's three favourite TSR authors are: Niles, Hawke and Cunningham. In that order.
5. That's our guess anyway. We could be wrong.

War

A *Birthright* novel by Simon Hawke

Published by TSR **Hardback £12.50** **Out now**



Hawke seems to be building himself a soap opera here, one perhaps more like *Dallas* than anything else. The sequel to *The Iron Throne* (**arcane** 1) is aptly titled, but the plot of this new series of *Birthright* books is beginning to focus on what goes on in the bedroom rather than what happens on the battlefield. This writer likes to describe intrigue born of sexual power, blackmail and underhand dealings, and he interprets (probably correctly) civil war as a time for personal vendettas as well as national scores.

Although this is 'Time of Legends' fantasy, there are a lot of parallels with the politics of the Arizona Indian Reservation where the author lives. Gannd, the son of the elf warrior Sylvanna and Lord Aedan of Anuire, is what humans pejoratively refer to as a 'breed' – half-elf, half-human. His character develops as he travels with the rather two-dimensional Reese.

"I must be imagining things. Is it possible that you are actually proposing marriage to me? Your father's mistress?"

The autocthonous elves, driven back into the forest of Cerilia by the humans, who had in turn been forced out of their ancestral lands by lackeys of the Dark One, now live in uneasy peace with their invaders after centuries of war. The elves fear for the forest as the humans continue to carve out their civilisation, but this concern is overshadowed by the matter of an empty throne. And, if you don't want politics, Simon Hawke is also obviously an American football fan as one scene clearly shows.

Hawke's world is detailed and convincing. He writes with a languid confidence and the clarity not to confuse you with the intricacy of his plotting. *The Iron Throne* had an easier wit, but this is a commendable sequel and an inspiring read for anyone involved in a *Birthright* campaign. You don't need to have read the first book to enjoy *War*, because much of what has happened before is cleverly re-capped. But I would advise you to do so anyway, not because it has the same cover image, but because it's good and this series could go on for a while.

Jonathan Palmer

Score 8/10

his current reign. Weese's clever manipulation of time and the order of events gives the reader just enough information to engender a sense of eerie foreboding and the awful inevitability of fate, without allowing the story to become predictable and boring – thankfully, you never really know what to expect next. *King of the Dead* is a dark novel which relies, for the most part, on its skillfully crafted atmosphere, a technique which lends greater impact to the few graphically disturbing scenes.

Although the story itself is of little direct use for a referee looking to steal some ideas, it's nevertheless well worth a look for any fans of horror games – *Ravenloft* or otherwise – due to its skillfully crafted atmosphere. There are elements here that could be used to great effect in almost any horror game you care to mention, and you'll get an extremely good read into the bargain. Good stuff and highly recommended.

Andy Butcher Score 8/10

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arcane scribblings

We try, we really do, but it seems that however hard we try we simply can't please everyone all of the time. As this month's first letter would suggest...

Dear arcane,

You asked for feedback on issue 7 of **arcane**, so here goes...

arcane is not living up to its claim of being "the roleplaying magazine". It's very slick, and easy on the eye, but it seems to be all style

> "arcane doesn't have enough meat"

over content. Sure, issue 7 was an improvement, with the features on horror and time travel, but it still doesn't have enough meat.

There are plenty of reviews however, occupying almost 20 pages of the editorial, and that's before the Hot Metal figures reviews and the three and a half pages of book reviews. That's an awful lot of pages dedicated to reviews, the huge majority of which are of no interest to me. You say that **arcane** is not system specific, but you have to agree that reviews are inevitably so.

Also, how can you justify your coverage of card games – they're not roleplaying games, are they? I love card games, but I don't expect to be reading about them in **arcane**. So, what do you say to that?

Noel Campbell, Birmingham

Okay, I get the picture. You don't like to read reviews, especially when those pages could be dedicated to more features. And you don't like figures, or the book pages. You just want more features, and, as you say, more "meat".

Fine.

You'll no doubt have noticed that last month we stopped our coverage of new miniatures. Although some roleplayers still use them in their sessions, the vast majority don't. We could never hope to review the whole range of figures anyhow, so we dropped those pages, the idea being to use the extra space for more features.

You don't like to see coverage of CCGs in **arcane**.

Tough.

Collectable card games are now a big part of the gaming industry, and because so many roleplayers also play CCGs, we're going to continue to cover them. True, perhaps we weren't being entirely true to our content by calling **arcane** *"the roleplaying magazine", but that's changed now too – take a look at the cover. I think* **arcane** *is by far and away the best "gaming magazine" you could possibly spend your money on. And I hope that with these changes now in place, you'll continue to do so.*

Dear arcane,

Another great issue hits the shelves – well done to one and all. However, I have to agree with those people who have written to you demanding genre-specific scenarios. Even though you couldn't possibly quote stats for all of the games in any one genre, you could at least provide them for the top three games, couldn't you?

As for the roleplaying verses acting debate, I wholeheartedly agree with your reply to Chris Howcrotf (**arcane** 7). Referees should not insist

> "It was a doddle and excellent fun"

that players stick rigidly to a scenario plot line. The best sessions I have ever been involved in were at GenCon, where players improvised far more than in my regular sessions. We all had a whale of a time! All the scenarios (if you can call them that) were based in a large city, where the players pretty well decided what they were going to get up to. It was hard work for me (as the referee) initially, but once the game was running smoothly, it was a complete doddle, and excellent fun.

Philip Giles, Beaconsfield

As I've stated before, I have a problem with including stats with scenarios (by which I mean the Encounter) in **arcane**. *It goes like this: discounting the fact that providing stats for (even) three game systems wastes a hell of a lot of space, we're never going to get the balance right – there's going to be (hopefully) thousands of gaming groups using the Encounter, and each one is going to be at a different stage in their campaign. Some characters will be fresh-faced greenies, others highly advanced stalwarts. Pitching the characters in our Encounter by use of stats to either of these extremes would be counter-productive. So we leave the stats business to the referee – he or she is going to know how best to pitch the strength of the Encounter's characters to the characters in the gaming party far better than us, after all.*

Dear arcane,

I'm sure I'm not the only roleplayer who expresses some difficulty when trying to explain the finer points of out hobby to the unenlightened. My thoughts were confirmed recently while I was eating at a restaurant and overheard a conversation on a table nearby. There was a chap who was desperately trying to explain what roleplaying was all about to a woman whom he was attempting to woo. He was failing dismally, though. With this in mind, I've drawn up a little list, which is entitled: The roleplayer's guide to the top ten things NOT to say on a date...

10. "And when the smoke eventually cleared, I realised I'd beaten my personal record for NCP kills in a single encounter!"
9. "I wonder what undead chicken madras tastes like."
8. "Talk about cutting it fine – have you ever tried drawing a pentagram of protection in the dark?"
7. "I prefer a good old stake through

communication

If you'd like to get in touch with **arcane** *there are several ways. The most traditional is to send us a letter clearly marked 'arcane scribblings' and addressed to* **arcane**, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW. *The slightly more technically advanced can send us a* fax on (01225) 465982, *while all you fully-fledged InfoCyberOtakuNauts out there can e-mail us at:*

arcane@futurenet.co.uk *or visit our Web site at:*

http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.html.

We look forward to hearing from you.

BBC war games

Letter Of The MONTH

Dear arcane,

According to a recent report in *The Guardian*, the News and Current Affairs department at the BBC hold 'war game' sessions, during which they act out what they'd do if war broke out, or if other major events were to occur (the assassination of the PM, say, or an aircraft hijacking). Just imagine it...

"Okay, so you've cancelled *One Foot in the Grave* after the death of the Queen Mum, that's 17 experience points for you, but you continued to broadcast *Grandstand*, despite the terrorists landing on the pitch. So, now for John Major managing to disarm the ninjas before they out the rest of the Cabinet. Okay, where's that D20?"

Well, maybe not. Anyhow, why don't you send me a T-shirt?

Paul Woolley, Pontypridd

Okay, for making me laugh you can have your T-shirt, even if your letter is in somewhat dubious taste. Anyone else know what the great British institutions get up to behind closed doors? And keep it clean...

the heart – none of this new fangled technical business."

6. "It's amazing how talkative you become after a fireball enema!"
5. "Do I have a nickname? Well, most of my mates call me Kebob the Contemptuously Cunning Kobold Killer, actually."
4. "It's generally not a very good idea to kill something if you can't pronounce its name."
3. "Of course Elvis is dead – I slit his throat myself just the other night."
2. "What's that? You think we've got BSE bad here in Britain? You should go to Rylon 5, at least here the cows aren't packing pieces!"
1. "And then the referee whipped out his fluorescent pink Cthulhu and I nearly filled my pants. By the way, how's the squid?"

Simon Hall, Tooting, London

Even better, how about: "No, I can't see you on Sunday, I've got a date with Katlinelle the Dark One who's going to teach me how to put a shine on my sword." No, perhaps not.

Dear arcane,

You rotten swines you! There I was, just about to finish off my retro' review of *Golden Heroes* for your grotty little rag, and then you go and beat me to it. You knew, didn't you? I think you've got telepathic government spies working for you, siphoning off all the good ideas and rushing them to print before the rest of us can get them to you – it's just not fair. Anyway, enough of that, how about covering some of the really obscure games in your retro' review column?

Andy Tucker, Devizes

No government agents around here mate, honest. (Though Andy does wear dark glasses and occasionally phones someone who he only refers to as 'Mr Black' on his mobile – very suspicious.) As far as more obscure games are concerned... Fine, not got a problem with that – let's see those contributions flood in!

Dear arcane,

I'd like to make a comment regarding the Star Letter (**arcane** 8) and Paul Pettengale's feature, 'Live and Let Die' (**arcane** 7) which dealt with the subject of character death. In the majority of the games that I've ever played, character death has always been exceedingly rare – I've found that a ref' can cause a great deal of discomfort and grief to a player character without

"Indifferent to the story and the gameworld"

recourse to physical violence or death. However, I've recently been involved in an *AD&D* game and numerous characters have snuffed it in a relatively short period of time (one poor player lost three characters in as many sessions). As a result, we ended up spending much of our time rolling up new characters, and we never ever got a chance to really get into the characters we'd created before they were mercilessly killed off, yet again. This ultimately made the campaign →

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arcane shorts

Snippets from all those letters which missed making it into the main columns...

80 percent of the female roleplayers I've ever played with have been tom-boys. Has anyone else spotted this strange phenomenon?

Pete 'Goblin' Barnard

What? No, I think you're somewhat misguided on that score, Pete. What actually constitutes a tom-boy in your opinion, eh?

What is the best card game in the whole world?.

Kevin McHugh

A toss up, half of the office says Magic, *the other half* NetRunner. *Take your pick - they're both great!*

I buy my cards from mail order suppliers - they're far, far cheaper than hobby shops in the high street.

Matthew Tucker

Most wise, though our local store is currently selling Ice Age *starters for a fiver!*

The tongue-in-cheek features you run with (such as the Ten Strange Skills one and Of Dice and Men), help to lighten the mag up, and ensure we don't get too po-faced about our gaming. Keep them coming!

Paul White

Which is exactly why we run them! Wait and see what we've got lined up for next month!

What's the chance of *Golden Heroes* being resurrected, perhaps with an all-new look? Any ideas?

Martin Wildman

Very slim, I'm afraid Martin. Games Workshop owns the license, and it doesn't do RPGs any more.

← no fun to play at all... We all became indifferent to the story and the gameworld.

Gav', Bridgend

You're absolutely right – killing off characters too often simply leads to frustration and disinterest on the part of the players in a campaign. But I still think that character death can be a rewarding experience for a player – it gives him a new perspective from which to view the gameworld, and a chance to play a radically different character.

Dear arcane,

I am a 16 year-old roleplayer in the Bristol area and I desperately need some help on a certain subject...

Though I have experience in both the *AD&D* and *Shadowrun* systems, I'm looking to expand and, having heard a great deal of good things about the Storyteller system, I've been out and bought *Werewolf: The Apocalypse.*

> "What Werewolf supplements should I buy?"

Therein lies my problem: outside of the main rules, I have little idea what other supplements I should buy in order to run a *Werewolf* campaign. Can you help?

Anthony Baker, Yate

Well Anthony, there's no reason why you shouldn't be able to run a decent campaign using the basic rules alone, but if you really want to spend money and bulk out your Werewolf *collection, you could do a lot worse than buy* The Player's Guide, Umbra: The Velvet Shadow *and* Caerns: Places of Power. *Oh, and maybe* Axis Mundi *(reviewed last issue) too. Hope you've got a wallet that's replete with cash!*

Dear arcane,

I am new to the roleplaying scene, a friend having recommended that I pick up a copy of **arcane**. Thing is, I thought roleplaying was all to do with the computer roleplaying games that people play on their PCs and Amigas. When I read your magazine I hardly understood three words. So, can you help me?

I want to know what a roleplaying system is, and how you play one. Can you play by yourself, or do you need a bunch of like-minded people to play with? Also, how do you play card games such as *Magic: The Gathering?*

Paul Jimoch, Wisbech

Blimey, I could write a whole book on this! A roleplaying game is a means of telling a story, but an interactive story where a group of people each play a central character, speaking out their words and telling a referee (a sort of director of the plot and arbiter of disputes) what their characters do. We use rules systems to govern the outcome of events (can a character really leap over a chasm if the player controlling him says so? If you're not sure a dice roll, which is fixed by the rules, is made to find out), and to set the general location and style of the story being told (there are fantasy systems, horror systems and others). Because it's a group experience you can't play alone, but being involved in the group is most of the fun.

Magic *and the many other card games are played differently – these are not roleplaying games, though they frequently borrow themes from RPGs. CCGs are usually played between two or more people and are usually based around one player using his cards, in accordance with the rules of the game, to beat the other players.*

Dear arcane,

Mike Hodder raised some valid points in the Soapbox column (**arcane** 8), though I believe he is more concerned with his own image than that of RPGs in general. He is right in stating that, "image and looks count for everything" in this world, but that doesn't mean we should have to reinforce this state of affairs. I am concerned with this need to be accepted which society purports.

I think the main problem is not image, but ignorance. The general public seems to think that we sit around in our robes and pointy hats, rolling dice and moving metal miniatures around. We need to educate rather than conform to other people's forced norms.

Darren Watford, Doncaster

True, we do need to educate those who don't understand RPGs and CCGs as to what they're all about, but, all too often, these people simply don't want to learn (especially from leather-clad, chain-laden crusties). That doesn't mean we shouldn't persist, though.

Dear arcane,

Can you please stop putting those stupid little quote things in the middle of letters!

Also, I'm having extreme difficulty in tracking down a set of the *Mage Tarot* cards featured in **arcane**

> "Stop putting stupid quotes in the letters!"

7. Given that you probably got sent yours for free, what's the chance of you sending them to me, if you're not using them, like?

Lee Thompson, London SE18

Ho ho ho, what an apt quote there I see. Ahem. Seeing as you asked so nicely, you can have those cards of ours (we've got two copies, after all).

Dear arcane,

Regarding your feature on horror in issue 7: the advice that you give referees is fantastic, providing you're speaking to Edgar Allen Poe! I don't think I've ever come across a referee with the skill to pull off what you're suggesting is possible. You just scare players off like that.

The happy sunflower, e-mail

Okay, so not all referees are brilliant at what they do, but isn't it up to arcane *to suggest ways they can improve? I think so, and I think the author of the piece did a fine job.*

arcane On-Line

It seems that some of you just can't keep your favourite skills to yourself, while the morbid insist on informing Karen Levell of the virtues of character death.

Hello and welcome!

Busy, busy, busy. Rush, rush, rush. Yes, it's all go at the moment here in the FutureNet office, and it's not just the usual level of panic. **arcane** on-line is about to undergo some important changes over the next month or so. The lines are being upgraded, the interface is being redesigned and there's been a big rush on thinking caps as we try to figure out how to further improve the service we offer you...

So, having spent a month up to my ears in HTML code, surrounded by scraps of paper and flowcharts that are threatening to flood the Somerset levels, I've just about had enough of it. I've finally decided to do the sensible thing and ask for some much-needed help. Your help.

I want to know what you want to see on **arcane's** Web site, so we can tailor it to suit your needs. Do we need competitions? What about gaming scenarios – are they a good idea? Do we need a help desk to deal with your roleplaying queries? Do you want us to provide more news, or would you prefer us to concentrate on playing advice instead? What have you seen that works well elsewhere? And what is your opinion of the **arcane** Web site as it stands?

This is your chance to tell us exactly what you want from **arcane** on-line, and, of course, what you don't want. To check out the Web site just point your browser at: http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.html. Have a critical look, think about how you think it could be improved, and then why not drop me an e-mail? After all, it's your Web site too. Now, where did I put that JPEG?

Karen Levell, On-line editor
klevell@futurenet.co.uk

Debates rage about all manner of RPG-related issues on the **arcane** forum. Here's a taster of what's going on out there.

Favourite skills are a topic of much concern and debate on the forum at the moment...

I received my back copy of issue 2 yesterday, and I couldn't help laughing at the ten most bizarre skills article. Having read that, I thought I would just have to add my own favourite. Sorry if this is going over old ground, but I would like to share the following with you. It is from the Palladium game *Ninja's and Superspies*.

Technical skills (also including art, language and photography). Roleplaying Game Design: gives a character the ability to drive itself beyond exhaustion, and to keep incredible hours even without food or sleep.

It also included an increase to your character's stamina, but unfortunately it was impossible to take this skill, presumably because if you were a hard-working RPG designer, you don't have time to save the world.

Stu
narenek@spods.dcs.kcl.ac.uk

My favourite skill comes from *Tales from the Floating Vagabond:* raise your children to be responsible adults instead of games designers. It gives characters the ability to do just what it says.

Ben Gunn
belmam@eee.rgu.ac.uk

Well, I always thought a good one would be: swear fluently in all languages. This would allow PC-NPC combat interaction over a language barrier.

DW
dan@hemlock.demon.co.uk

And on character death...

I would rather see my characters die in a fitting way than be retired from a game. That way you bring your character to a close rather than have him fade out. However, there is nothing really wrong with character death if it is done well. Some of the most memorable moments are owed to character death, my favourite one being four of the players screaming "don't push the red button" just before a rather messy party demise (the fifth player's brains suddenly exploded and we were torn apart by a strange creature).

Tgunton@plymouth.ac.uk

I thought the article on character death in **arcane** 6 expressed my opinions extremely well... The only problem is, now I'm just kicking myself that I didn't write it.

PS: I'm not sure I would ever kill a character for 'over-roleplaying' and ruining the game for others. I might torture their character. Force the player to roleplay in detail, being kept in jail for 15 years (or a low berth for 60 in *Traveller*). Kill or destroy everything their PC values. Have their PC constantly hunted down by a force much more powerful than themselves. Initiate long and expensive legal proceedings against the PC (and player if it comes to it). Put a spoonful of salt in their coffee. Pull strange faces at them behind their back. Pass secret messages to other players to make them feel as if they are missing out on something. Which they will be – bonus experience, magic items and such.

I definitely wouldn't kill them, though – that could be classed as being mean.

Dave
dave.maple@wmc.ac.uk

In my opinion character death is a vital part of roleplaying games. If there is no chance of a character dying then the roleplaying game will become boring. Of course, I'm not saying that referees should take every opportunity that comes their way to kill off the PCs, but there should always be the possibility (however unlikely it may be) that a character might die.

alexmurison@cybernet.com

arcane
the roleplaying magazine
arcane (a:'kein) adj. requiring secret knowledge to be understood; esoteric. [C16: from L arcānus secret, from arcere to keep safe]

Check out FutureNet's arcane forum for roleplaying debates, ads and reader contacts.

What you need to get on-line

*To access **arcane** on-line on FutureNet – and the whole Internet, for that matter – you need the following bits and pieces:*
A computer (PC, Mac, Amiga, etc), a telephone line (your household line is fine), a modem (14,400 baud or 28,800 baud is best), and an Internet account (try Demon on 0181 371 1000 – they provide a good, cheap service).

free reader ads

If this was a car boot sale, we'd have to get another field.

games for sale

● RPGs, comics, magazines, books and film publicity sold, bought, exchanged. Massive stock. Sae for catalogue. Richard Stevens, 49 Guinness Lane, Exwick, Exeter, Devon EX4 2LP

● *AD&D* 1st edition hardbacks, plus *Forgotten Realms* book. Cash or swap. Ray 01792 461798

● Over 60 fantasy miniatures for sale, £40 ono. Also *Rage, Umbra, Wyrm* cards traded. Tim 0171 2490084

● Hugely playable roleplaying card game seeks attractive games manufacturer. No time wasters please. Adrian 01734 463071

● Play *Dragon Dice?* Then buy my Dragonlord die. Unopened. Offers to Asa, 1 Miskin Rd, Miskin, Pontyclun, South Wales. 01443 227367

● *Ars Magica* 3rd edition plus 4 supplements, excellent condition. The lot, £40. Simon 01352 711798

● *Warhammer* empire army – 1,500 points, also some *40k* space marines. Michael 01253 720861 after 4.30pm, full list available

● *Warhammer 40,000* plus supplements, small eldar army £60 ono, also *AD&D* 2nd edition and supplements. Daniel 01729 823331

● Games for sale. *Earthdawn, Changeling, Wraith* and others. Darius 01634 575837. Leave message and details on answerphone

● *Blackmoor* and *Greyhawk* original booklets. Also *Dragon Pass* in Chaosium and Avalon Hill versions. Mark 0114 2313025

● *Warhammer Fantasy Battle & Warhammer* armies, £10 the lot. *TWG:2000* 2nd edition + 11 supplements, £28 the lot. 86 piece elven army £20. *Toon* roleplay, £5. For list, Dave 01279 452040

● First edition *FR* campaign set! £20. Under Illefarn – first ever *FR* module! Only £15. Good condition. Bargain prices. David 01796 472211 evenings

● *AD&D* books, supplements, adventures. *Magic* 169 cards. *Blood Wars* 205 cards. Roger 01828 670330. Can swap or sell

● *AD&D Forgotten Realms* campaign expansions, also *Warhammer* basic set, *Battle Magic*, army lists (all unused). Crowie 01734 621623

● Epic orc army – 8,000 points plus. Some painted to superb standard. Terry 01733 234976 evenings

● *RuneQuest, RuneQuest* monsters. *Warhammer 40k, Warhammer TMNT, Warhammer* supplements. 130 painted Citadal miniatures, lots unpainted. £250 ono. Daniel McGowan 01622 716283

cards for sale

● *Mythos* starter decks x2 plus 4 packs booster 1, £15, postage inclusive. 01494 461729

● *Vampire: TES* starter deck and booster pack. Unused, as new. Sell for £7. Keith, evenings, 01264 392064

● *Jyhad* set for sale as well as loads of *INWO, Rage, ST:NG*. All offers considered. After 6pm weekdays. Alistair 01493 662734

● *Kult* cards for sale and trade. Write with details to Alex, 30 Warner Street, London EC1R 5EX

● *M:TG* cards for sale. Mark 0181 5781097

● *M:TG* cards. 1,500+, all vgc. £250-300 worth. Lots more green/white, mostly 5 Serra Angels, Shivan etc. Hampshire area 01489 583053

● *Star Wars* CCG set £160. Possibly split. *ST:TNG* white border set, £90. Neil 01327 262765

wanted

● *Vampire: TES* and *Dark Sovereigns* cards wanted. Will buy full collections and/or trade single cards. Paul 0191 2401811

● Copy of Games Workshop *Battlecars* game (boxed) required. Good condition please. Steve 0121 5568347, evenings

● Unpainted 25mm fantasy/medieval miniatures wanted. Andrew 01423 863941

Someone had some unpainted miniatures this month. Now, where were they?

● *Empire of the Petal Throne*, any edition. Ray 01792 461798, evenings

● *Greyhawk Wars, Queen of the Spiders, Scourge of the Slavelords, Temple of Elemental Evil.* Jamie 01203 227542

● *Spacehulk Genestealer* expansion, reasonable condition. Steve 01203 678100

● *Greyhawk* modules *Scourge of the Slavelords, Castle Greyhawk, Fate of Istus*, will pay well. Ian 01205 760864

● Out of print *Shadowrun* supplements, especially *Universal Brotherhood* and *Lone Star*, to borrow or buy. Andy 01273 749642

● Iron Crown Enterprises' *Dark Space* supplement. Darren on 01709 798379

● *FGU: C&S* supplements. Will also consider bulk purchase of collections of RPGs. Andrew Mussell, 110a Amethyst Road, Christchurch BH23 3EF

clubs

Some clubs have been deleted due to lack of space, but if those missing write in, we'll happily include them next time.

● *Magic: The Gathering, Star Wars* and *Star Trek*. Join our playing group in Bristol. 0117 9721701

● *M:TG* Brentwood Informals, Essex Arms, Brentwood, Essex. PJ 01277 224834. B/wood Informals meet on Sundays

● Gamers in West Wickham and Bromley area needed. See the Burning Hand RPC, Railway pub, West Wickham. 0181 6503567

● Wednesday Knights: roleplaying in Wimbledon. Mature gamers meeting every Wednesday in Wimbledon. Gerard, evenings, 0181 5450133

● Leicester Games Club 7.30pm-11pm Mondays and Tuesdays. Meets Rainbow & Dove Function Room, Charles Street, Leicester

● Dragon Hearts RPG club is looking for new players in Oldham area. Ste 0161 6267199, Pete 0161 6260084

No, that's his name, Ste. Most probably Swedish.

● Brentwood Roleplaying Club – every Tuesday 7pm-10pm, Hermit Youth Centre, Brentwood, Essex. 01277 219262. RPGs, wargames, CCGs

● Northumbrian Adventurers Guild meets every Sunday, Newsham Library, Blyth. We play RPGs, *Warhammer, 40k*, etc. 01670 366881

● Roleplay club in Epsom, Surrey needs new members. All RPGs. Cliff 0181 3938103 for more info

● Travel and Imagine Gaming Group. Playing *AD&D* at the moment. Willing to play anything. Gosport area. James 01705 353723

● Bournemouth Berserkers Games Club. RPGs: Fri 7-10pm. Wargames: Sun 10am-10pm. New/old players/DMs welcome. Any age. Andrew 01202 481668

● Stockport SAGA roleplaying. Wednesday 8-11.30 pm. You name it – we play it. Pub: over 18s only. Mark 0161 4302061

● *WARP*. Mon 7.30, 27a Heathfield Road SW18 3HR. 16+. Contact Dave, 53b Cologne Road, SW17 2AH. 0171 7381807

● Carlisle roleplaying and wargaming club. Greystone Community Centre. Meets every Sunday from 2pm till 9pm. Clive 01228 45160

● Omega. Manchester roleplayers meet 2nd and 4th Sundays, 10-5. Paul Mather 0161 3441066, e-mail: mather.dragons@dial.pipex.com

● Goats! goats Haverhill goatie goat stoaty stoat. Suffolk. Bloated stoaty goat! We play games aaah! Bob 01440 712910

● Reading Roleplaying Association. Near town centre. 18+ please: licensed premises. Bar available. Brian 01734 816195

● Mid-Surrey games club meets 2-3 times weekly and welcomes new members – players and DMs. Most RPGs played. All ages. Scott 01932 865308

● Guild of Melee and Magic – London's biggest club. First visit free, annual membership £5. Jason 0181 7158675 for information

● Guild of Melee and Magic – South London Branch. Sundays 2-7pm. Greyhound, Sydenham Rd, Sydenham SE19 – Jon 0181 6999654

● Guild of Melee and Magic – West London Branch. Sats 2-7, Northfields Community Centre, North Croft Rd, Northfields W16 Gerald 0181 9911297

Need assistance in setting up a successful club? Contact Jason at the Guild of Melee and Magic 0181 7158675.

contacts

● Chill GM, 35, needs to contact adult Edinburgh gamers for local info. Brady 01639 645375, after 18.30

● Female goth into vampires, long hair, cats, seeks like-minded souls. Jay, 45 Landsdown Road, Quarrybank, Brierley Hill, West Midlands DY5 2EW

● Novice *AD&D* gamer/DM wanting to exchange ideas. Matthew, 1 Leadhall Avenue, Harrogate HG2 9NH

● 16 year-old complete novice seeks *Rifts* gaming group. Warrington area. Willing to travel. Andy 01925 791934

● 20 year-old roleplayer seeks roleplayers in Newcastle area to form group. Interested? David 0191 2662906

● 13 year-old roleplayer seeks groups of similar age in Watford area. Chris, between 6 and 9pm, 01923 779999

● Slough games club seeks players. RPGs, CCGs, boardgames. Ages 18+. Call Mark on 01753 859157

● Help offered on computer RPGs. Write for a list. Paul Hardy, 33 Firtree Drive, Wales, Sheffield S31 8LZ

● GM/player looking for groups in Aberdeen/Ellon area for *Dark Champions* and *AD&D*. Lloyd 01651 851599

● Anyone to explain/play *M:TG?* Nick 01388 527783, evenings. Age 13+

● Players (age 18+) wanted for sci-fi game. Takes place on Sunday nights in central London. Lloyd 01707 659196

● *Star Wars* RPG. 2 brothers (20 years+) seek fellow players. Bristol area. Kevin 0117 9555929

● Norwich group seeks new players (18+). Meet on Friday evenings. Call Kenton 01603 502056, after 8pm

● York area. Inexperienced gamer eager to join any gaming system. Over 20s only. Sarah 01347 878559

● *Magic* and other games systems especially GW games. New opponents needed between 14-20 yrs. Strood. Robert 01634 221314

● Skinny, white Dundee boy, into (blood) bondage and domination. Seeks cracking boys/girls for *Vampire*. Rick 01382 665310

● *Vampire/AD&D* player seeks correspondents to trade cards, swap ideas etc. Gary, 4 Ransevyn Park, Whitehead, Northern Ireland BT38 9LY

● Veteran, aged 30, night shift worker free on Mon and Wed nights seeks mature group aged 20+ in the Winchester area. Howard Kingston, flat 4, Fulflood Court, Greenhill Road, Winchester SO22 5EG

● Experienced RPGer seeks other players in Dublin. Russell 2300980

● Aldershot to Reading: mature wargamer interested in *Rifts*, sci-fi, fantasy in 6mm!! John 01344 780276. Clubs, individuals, 'others'

● *Cyberpunk* GM seeks 4-6 man corp covert ops team to return to basics. Wayne, Dundee 506451

● *Champions* players wanted by experienced GM in London area to start new on-going *Superhero* campaign. Dean 0181 2523315

● Players wanted to play a range of sci-fi, fantasy and horror systems. Somerset and Devon. Mike 01458 447989

● *Cyberpunk* ref and *AD&D, Kult, WFRP* player seeks club/group in Herts area. James on 01992 589689

● Maturer RPG player into *AD&D, Runequest, CoC* etc, seeks other players. Steve, 31 Riverview, Sturry, Canterbury, Kent

● RPG players/club wanted. Will play anything. Pref *AD&D, Traveller*. Pref 18+ male/female, ref/players. Corby area. Paul 0468 125920

● Cheltenham group seeks players (18+) for *AD&D/Shadowrun*. Other games considered. Joe 01242 226648, after 6pm

Joe of Cheltenham wrote in looking for players for AD&D *and* Shadowrun. *He has since written to us again saying he's been "swamped with replies" since his advert first appeared in* arcane *7, so would we please take it out. Done.*

● Small group wants to start club. Needs players and DMs. Tameside area. Alan 0161 3082053

reader ads

● *Ancient* gamer (34) without transport: *CoC, GURPS, Star Trek, Cyberpunk,* requires others to resurrect himself. Chris 01703 211237

● Player/GM seeks other players in local area. Andy, 13 Albright House, Kempsey Close, Oldbury B69 1EY

● *Rage, Magic, Blood Bowl.* 13 year-old player needs somebody to play with. Nicholas Gunn, Laverstock, Salisbury. 01722 337382

● Novice and limboed *AD&D* player would like to start a roleplaying group in Bristol/Chew Valley area. Jon 01761 452766

● GM/player seeks sensible RPG groups in Bexhill area. I hate hack 'n' slash. James 0973914004

● Appreciators of all things imaginary contact 'The Dead Duet' to form group into fantasy/sci-fi. 22 Tormead, Hythe, Southampton 01703 849842

● Derbyshire old fart seeks anyone. 18 yrs+, any RPG. My place or yours, sweetybuns? Gary 01629 826112. Someone? Anyone?

Gary's gone to the effort of re-wording his reader ad this month – so, give him a call, sweetybuns or no sweetybuns.

● Anyone write to Fantasy Roleplayer into B5, weird stuff? Catriona Singfield, 15 Bod Offa Drive, Buckley, Clwyd CH7 2PB

● Colin Wilson – somewhere in Birmingham – please write/phone? Catriona and Peter, 15 Bod Offa Drive, Buckley, Clwyd CH7 2PB

● Dublin gamers seek fresh talent, players with an open mind willing to play RPGs and LARPs. Jason Hickey 01 2801097

● Female, 25+ (Doncaster area) wants to roleplay again. Can you help? Jane 01302 881346

● Complete novice (early 20s) seeks local RPG group. Taunton area. Will travel. Neil 01823 353681

● *M:TG* and Games Workshop players wanted in Horsham, West Sussex area. Paul, aged 15, 01403 733433

● *40k* and *Warhammer* players wanted. Tunbridge Wells area. Anthony Burgess, 33 Leeves Close, Heathfield TN21 0AW

● Looking for *AD&D* players in the Carlisle area. Phillip Harrison, 2 Parham Grove, Belle Vue, Carlisle, Cumbria CA2 7RW. Aged 17+

● Players/Storytellers wanted for *Werewolf: the Apocalypse.* Also maybe other RPGs. Medway area. Neal 01634 719194

● 15 year-old *AD&D* player seeks fellow gamers in the Portsmouth area. Please, please contact me soon. Stuart 01705 610901

live action

● Free webspace for UK LRP clubs. Suppliers/site owners also considered. Contact Anna, email: anna@abraxas.sonnet.co.uk 0181 3183375

Uh oh.

● LRP magic users 'self-igniting large church candles': 6 each. Gushing smoke pods (red or white) 5 each. Can be set off with 9v battery. Large magic user's walking cane (latex weapon – brand new) 30. 0151 3439363

● Children charity volunteers wanted. To help out at a large Live Role Play event. 0151 3439363

● *Fomoria* LRP in darkest Dorset! Overland sites, latex weapons, fully costumed experienced monsters, beginners welcome. Darren 01725 517322

● I.O.W. *Masquerade Vampire* LARP meetings every other Sunday, Newport Youth Centre, 7.15pm. Call Nigel 01983 528758. New members wanted

● *Sword & Sorcery* LRP in Manchester area. 'Nemesis' 0161 7476905 or 2 Whitegates Rd, Cheadle SK8 1EA

● *Fantasy/Vampire* lrp, Derby/Nottingham. Martin Lee 08501 89892

● The Dark Door Club runs *Cthulhu*-esque LRP adventures. For information, P Hardy, 32 Park Hall Road, London SE21 8DW

● *Elemental Lords* lrp based in Worcester; a fantasy game of magic, mayhem and monsters. Paul 01905 425672

● Are there any LRPers of *Vampire: The Masquerade* (or others?) in the Birmingham area? Danny 0121 4782163

fanzines and PBM

● Players wanted for fantasy and sci-fi postal RPGs. Paul Baldowski, 93 Newark Drive, Corby, Northants NN18 0HA

● PBMs (e-mail) – information wanted on available games. Please send details to group.admar-2000@eurocontrol.be

● Want to be involved in PBMs? Send details to Rhys Perkins, 85 Nelson Avenue, Minster/sea, Sheppey, Kent ME12 3SF

● Board wargames by mail? Join AHIKS the original PBM organisation. AHIKS, 10 Talbrook, Brentwood, Essex CM14 4PY

● New penpal and fantasy/science-fiction/horror magazines both need contributors of ads/stories/poems. If you're interested write to Gael, 13 Hillside Aenue, Silverstone, Northants NN12 8UR

● Jorune fanzine: *Borkelby's Folly* – sample issue £2 from Ray Gillham, 22 Mirador Crescent, Uplands, Swansea SA2 0QX

● *Salamander* – new fanzine! Sci-fi, fantasy, gaming. 50p. ssae, cheques payable to Brian Hickey, Lower Luscombe, Harbetonford, Totnes TQ9 7EF

● *Role Your Own* fanzine for *Vampire, Cyberpunk.* Send sae and £1 to 12 Colwick Lodge, Whimsey Park, Nottingham

● *Journey's End* Console RPG fanzine – £1.50. Ann Simpson, 230 Thornbridge Avenue, Great Barr, Birmingham B42 2AL. 0121 6047524

● Warpstone – the *Warhammer FRP* fanzine. £1 from John Foody, 10 Colenso Road, Clapton, London E5

● Discover play-by-mail games! 40-page fanzine £1.75. Cheques payable to "Jamie Lang", 53 Scott Road, Sheffield S4 7BG

● *Entity,* the skiffy fanzine. Fiction, PBM. Send 40p and ssae to *Entity,* Old Barn, Hundley Way, Charlbury OX7 3QE

● *Role Call* – A4 fanzine for console RPGs (FFIII etc). 4 issues available £1.20 or £7 sub (6 issues). Rachel Ryan 01925 490910

● New fanzine. *RAGE* It covers RPGs, PBMs, CCGs, sci-fi & lots of other stuff. Call Peter 01291 421105

● Write to Trevannion House, Cardrew Lane, Redruth, Cornwall for free RPG by mail! Leave Address. Ten players needed

Oliver of Redruth offered free PBM games in arcane *5. Now he's written to say he has his ten players and 'thanks to everyone who applied'. And please would we take his advert out. Done.*

messages

● Plastique, Blood, Raptor – You Aztech spud heads better watch us go now. Predators rule the shadows! Believe it

● Echo Squad – we know about the white room. We know about the dimension walking – the CIA – Langely, Virginia

● Kinrise: The Keep. Montana offers Sanctuary to professional pro-human kin and herd. Head north and ask for Pitor

● Lost! Allen the Snotling. If found, please contact Snade the Insignificant on 0800 0000 SNAVE-0000 0000 No! Come back Allen!

● This is a general distress call from the USS Bozeman. We are losing power. Please respond. Transmission ends

Will the crew of the USS Bozeman be saved in next month's reader ads? Tune in on August 9th to find out.

other stuff

● *X-Files* ID, not just a plastic card but the whole thing – looks very realistic, Mulder or Scully. £10. Also all episodes of season 1 & 2. Send list of wants: M Draper, 159 Orchard Row, Soham Ely, Cambs CB7 5FY

● *M:TG* competition in the north-east. Rare cards as prizes. Bryan 01325 301673

● Game gear for sale. 15 games, accessories and carry case. Sell all for £150. Adrian 01865 242612

● CDI. Good condition with games and films. FMV etc. £200 ovno. 01243 536216

● 7,200 point Eldar army – characters, troops, support weapons, harlequins. Over 200 models worth £475 new. £350 ono. 01923 852645

● Conan novels and other fantasy novels sale. SAE to Jeremy Winstanley, 6 Dunoon Close, Calcot, Reading RG31 7YJ

● Collection JRR Tolkein books. New condition. Will sell for half cover price. Ms Kerrigan, 9 Ashtree House, Woodberry Drive, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 3LP

● Clan Amber, a residential amber RPG convention in Edinburgh. 8-10 Nov. Contact Nicky Cannon, 70/5 Craighouse Gardens, Edinburgh EH10 5UN

We've written off for some more information about this. Maybe it will get into the Conventions column next time.

● UK gamers list. Send sae with details to Ross, 369 Broomhead Drive, Dunfermline KY12 9AG

● Fantasy/SF figure painting service. Award winning artist. Send sae to Paul, 27 Diamond Street, York YO3 7LH

Please place my free ad under the following heading

- ☐ Games for sale
- ☐ Cards for sale
- ☐ Wanted
- ☐ Clubs
- ☐ Contacts
- ☐ Other stuff

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August 1996

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Gnome World
WRITERS: DAN ABNETT AND ANDY LANNING
ARTIST: ANDREW CURRIE
DWARF MINING LONGBOAT "NOSTRILHOL" CREW: SEVEN COURSE: VOYAGE TO THE MOUNTAIN SMITHY REASON FOR DELAY: DETOUR TO INVESTIGATE UNCHARTERED ISLAND
SHORTLY THEREAFTER..
THEY'RE COMIN BACK LADS!
OH, I SPIES 'EM RIGHT ENOUGH, BO'SUN SPUNKY. YOU SPIES 'EM TOO, DONT YOU, GREEDY?
AYE.
'QUESTION IS, WOT IN THE NAME OF BLOODY BALROGS HAS THAT TWERP WITLESS GOT ON 'IS 'EAD?'
MMMHH! MMGGHHP!
IN THE SURGEON'S CABIN...
I DONT LIKE THIS, CAPTAIN.
ME NEITHER SPUNKY.
WELL DOC? WHAT'S THE VERDICT?
MMGHH!
ZORRY, CAPTAI I DONT ZINK I CA BUDGE IT.
IZ WEDGED ZO TIGHT!
SPLOTT!!
SKREEEEEEEEEE!
AND SO, AT DINNER...
MY THOUGHTS EXACTLY, WITLESS. EAT UP YER SCAN, LADS. AND WE CAN SET SAIL.
MMMH MMGHG MGHP MHHGG...
THAT STRAW WAS A SMART IDEA, SKIP. HOW'S YOUR SOUP WITLESS?
ODDS BODKINS!
TO BE CONTINUED...

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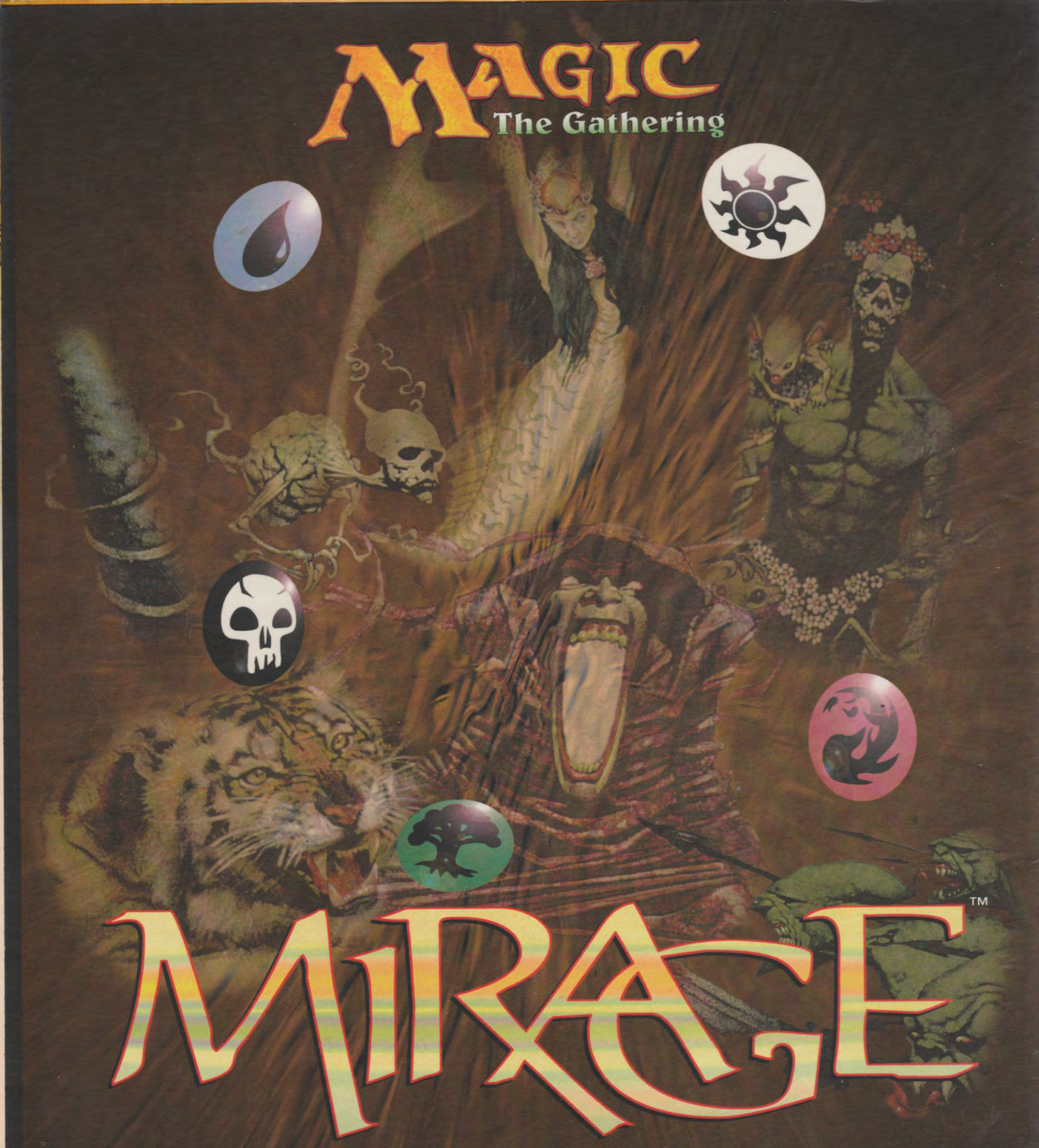

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